OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™

THE AWARD WINNING GAMES MAGAZINE

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TOP 25 GAMES
AMSTRAD
THE GREATEST GAMES EVER MADE FOR LORD SUGAR'S COMPUTER



"HOW ARE WE GOING TO MAKE A GAME OUT OF THIS?"
SIMON PHIPPS TACKLES MONTY PYTHON

THE BIG FIGHT
SPECTRUM VS C64
DEVELOPERS FINALLY REVEAL THE GREATEST 8-BIT HOME COMPUTER

THE MAKING OF
THING ON A SPRING
THE CREATION OF GREMLIN'S STRANGEST VIDEOGAME HERO

THE HISTORY OF
SOUL CALIBUR
WHY THE SOUL STILL BURNS

He's behind you!

3D MONSTER MAZE

Malcolm Evans sinks his teeth into his monstrous ZX81 killer app



IN THIS ISSUE OF RETRO GAMER

ERIC CHAHI
"I DIDN'T REALISE YOU COULD USE A COMPUTER TO MAKE A GAME"

PLATINUM PRODUCTIONS
THE 8-BIT DEVELOPER THAT MADE ITS NAME CREATING EXCELLENT PORTS AND ARCADE CONVERSIONS

ZYNAPS
WE REVISIT ONE OF THE SPECCY'S GREATEST SHOOT-'EM-UPS

GOLDEN AXE
WHY SEGA'S SUPERB BEAT-'EM-UP IS STILL A CLASSIC

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MAZE GAME?



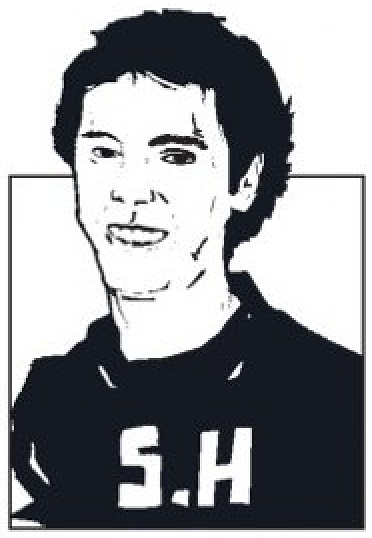
DARRAN JONES

I love *Amidar*. It's a great concept, fun to play and a highly interesting take on *Pac-Man*.

Expertise:
Completing deeply average videogames

Currently playing:
Child Of Eden

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



STUART HUNT

I've always had a fondness for *Amidar*, partly down to its barmy plot, which sees you assume the role of a gorilla avoiding angry tribesman one minute and then a paint roller-dodging pigs the next.

Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them

Currently playing:
Guardian Heroes HD

Favourite game of all time:
Guardian Heroes HD



PAUL DAVIES

Does 'High Explosive' spec ops on Veteran count in *Modern Warfare 2*? If not, *Pac-Man*.

Expertise:
Banging my head against a brick wall

Currently playing:
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare 3

Favourite game of all time:
Ghouls 'N Ghosts



IAIN LEE

There was one for the Dragon that I think was just called *Maze*. Loved it.

Expertise:
Pretending to be an American on Xbox Live

Currently playing:
Halo Reach

Favourite game of all time:
Elite (the BBCB version)



JASON KELK

I've spent hours playing *Citadel* on the C64 over the years, since it's a robust combination of scrolling maze game and shoot-'em-up.

Expertise:
Bizarre pieces of 8-bit hardware

Currently playing:
RG Rampage

Favourite game of all time:
Io



PAUL DRURY

In the arcade, *Amidar*, with its funky tune and clever 'painting' screen. At home, *Phantom Slayer* on the Dragon 32. Used to scare me to death.

Expertise:
Vacuum tubes

Currently playing:
Astro Wars (Grandstand)

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep In Space



CRAIG GRANNELL

It has to be the wonderful *Pac-Man*/*Rogue*/*Wor* mash-up *Forget Me Not* on iOS.

Expertise:
Games that don't require 37 fingers to play

Currently playing:
Smash Cops

Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.



DAVID CROOKES

Pac-Man. Simplistic, fun and with the ability to give you the willies when you realise you're going down a path of no return.

Expertise:
All things Amstrad CPC, Dizzy, Atari Lynx and PlayStation

Currently playing:
WipEout HD

Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



ASHLEY DAY

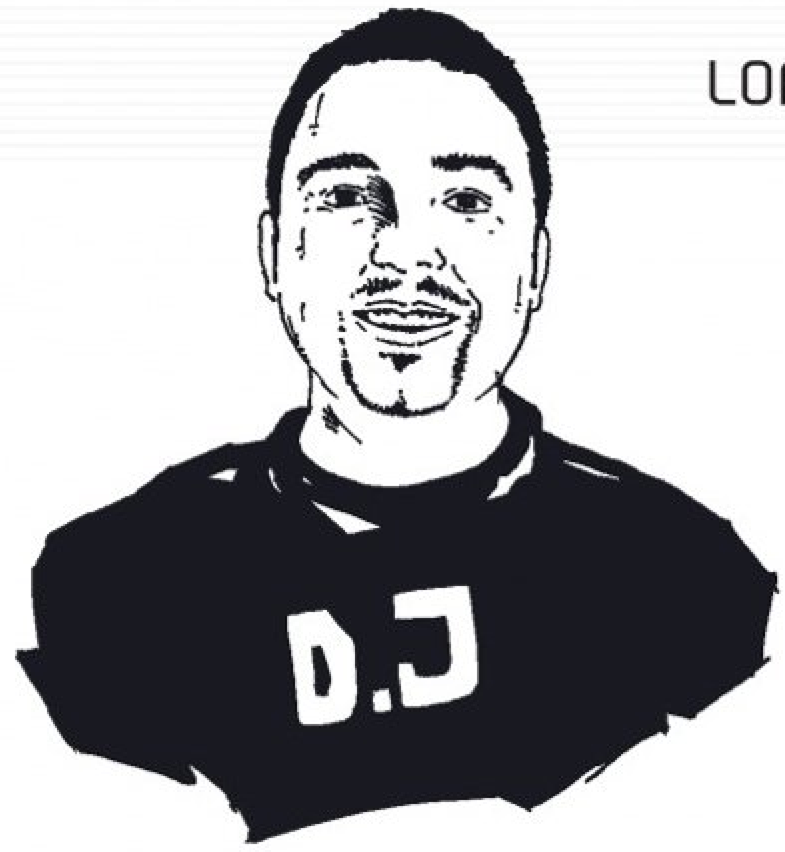
Does *Metal Gear* count? It's basically *Pac-Man* but with a gruff-looking man and some angry soldiers instead of ghosts.

Expertise:
The games of Team17, the *Shining Force* series and the Amiga CD32

Currently playing:
Valkyria Chronicles 3

Favourite game of all time:
Shining Force III

LOADING...



Recently we've had lots and lots of letters requesting more coverage of computer games, particularly 8-bit computer games. Sometimes we're asked nicely, sometimes we're not, but we are asked, so we thought we'd push the boat out this issue, with a ton of great content dedicated to the classic machines of yesteryear.

No doubt you've already seen our awesome cover. Even now it tickles me that it's been created from ASCII characters, as opposed to the usual pixel design that we often feature. In fact, compare it to last month's *Metal Slug* cover and you'd almost think you were looking at two different mags; such is the diversity of our hobby.

We also settle one of the longest-running debates of all time: which was the better system out of the Sinclair Spectrum and Commodore 64? The answer may surprise some, and no doubt anger others, but after listening to the arguments rage for the best part of 30 years (and they still happen on the forum from time to time) we thought we'd speak to developers who worked on both and find out what they thought. If you don't agree with the verdict then feel free to send in your thoughts.

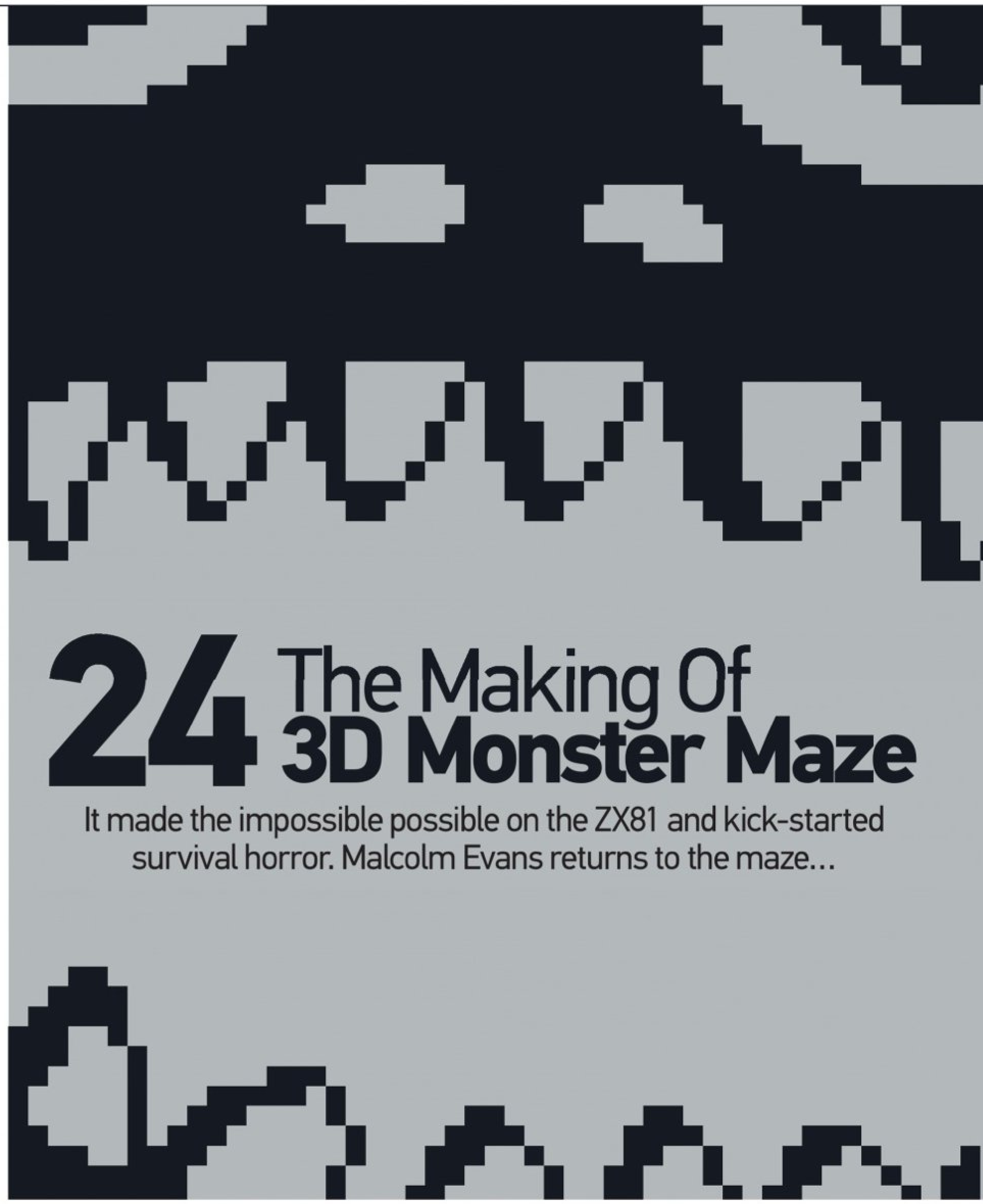


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>> Load 99 Breathing new life into classic games

FEATURED



RETRO REVIVALS

In the hot seat this month…





"A distinctive companion piece to the PC titles" Samuel Roberts

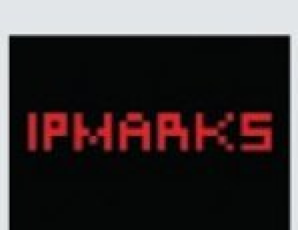


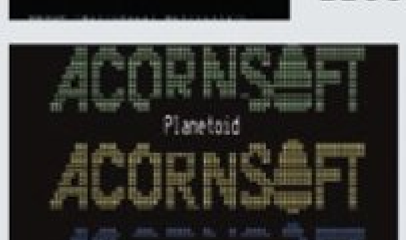






retroGAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL







ESSENTIALS

RETRO RATED







retro radar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WORLD



>> We're at that annoying time of the year when there just isn't a lot happening, so what better time than to look at the large number of established franchises that will be making their comebacks during the coming year?

✱ CONTENTS





» [360] Initially we weren't too impressed with the *Devil May Cry* reboot. It's starting to grow on us, though…



» [PS3] *Tomb Raider* is one of our most anticipated games, and looks like an exciting change of direction for the franchise.

INCOMING!

THE NEW GAMES WE'RE ITCHING TO PLAY

We've only just begun to take our first tentative steps into 2012, but it's already looking like an exciting year. Franchises are getting sequels, receiving reboots or are being stuffed into enticing-looking HD collections. And we plan on playing all of them.

High-definition collections are still proving to be extremely popular with both gamers and publishers. Konami is kicking off proceedings with its *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*, which will be available in a matter of days and is reviewed on page 94. It features the *Substance* version of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty*, the *Subsistence* version of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* and the PSP game *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*. It also includes MSX ports of *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. Konami's final two collections are *Zone Of The Enders*, which will contain both underrated PS2 games, and *Silent Hill HD Collection*, which is comprised of the magnificently creepy *Silent Hill 2* and *Silent Hill 3*.

Konami isn't the only publisher getting in on the act, as Sony and Capcom also have high-definition collections planned for later in the year. The first up is *The Jak And Daxter Collection*. While the original remains one of the finest platformers of the last generation, its sequels are nowhere near as impressive. Hopefully, Sony will make the games available separately on PSN, as it's done with the likes of *Ico*, *God Of War* and *Sly Cooper*. Capcom's incoming proposition is far more exciting, as it's a collection of the first three *Devil May Cry* games. There's no official release date yet, but we're guessing that it will be released to tie in with the incoming reboot of the franchise, which is being handled by Ninja Theory, the developer behind *Enslaved* and *Heavenly Sword*. Here's hoping that a little more effort is put into the *Devil May Cry* ports, so we don't end up with another *Resident Evil 4* disappointment…

Capcom's controversial reboot of *Devil May Cry* isn't the only game it's working on, though. *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* is due in March, while the excellent-looking *Street Fighter X Tekken* should be arriving later in the year. Capcom is also preparing to release its Vita version of *Ultimate Marvel vs Capcom 3*, which should be launching with the machine on 22 February.

Electronic Arts has similarly decided that the time is right to air out some of its older franchises. *SSX* is up first and is EA's attempt to update its popular snowboarding series for the current generation. The original *SSX* was a launch game for the PS2 over 11 years ago and proved extremely popular with early adopters who had been starved of decent launch titles. There hasn't been an *SSX* game since *SSX Blur* on the Wii five years ago, so it's going to be interesting to see if the exhilarating gameplay is a big hit when it's finally released. *Syndicate* is EA's other big hitter, and it's also one of the most controversial reboots of recent times – far more than Capcom's *Devil May Cry* – with a number of gamers very unhappy with the first-person direction that the title is currently taking. It looks extremely similar to the recent *Deus Ex* game, which we're happy with, but we can understand why some fans of the original are getting upset.

Sonic fans have a reason to be excited, as Sega has finally announced the second episode of *Sonic The Hedgehog 4*. Little has been revealed yet, but we do know







» [PS3] Most games would be better if Hugo was in them. This is a fact.

> "Franchises are getting sequels and reboots or being stuffed into HD collections"

that it will feature new character animations and a tweaked physics engine. It also marks the returns of Tails and Metal Sonic, and new gameplay mechanics have been hinted at. Looks like the *Sonic* cycle is about to start all over again…

Sega is keeping relatively quiet about its 2012 line-up, particularly its digital products, although it has just revealed PS3 versions of *The House Of The Dead 3* and *4*. Here's hoping, though, that it manages to improve on last year's excellent releases of *Daytona USA*, *Guardian Heroes* and *Renegade Ops*.

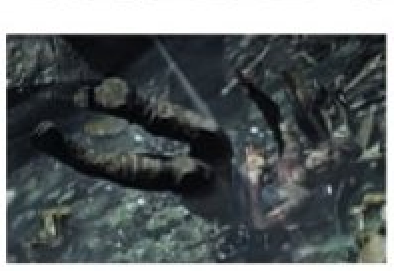
Nintendo is making big plans for 2012 too. The 3DS is finally beginning to build momentum, while the Wii U should also launch, although don't expect news on games until at least E3. Still, things are looking good for the 3DS, with a number of interesting games on the horizon. *Kid Icarus: Uprising* will finally be released, Luigi is getting another chance to vacuum up ghosts in *Luigi's Mansion 2*, and *Paper Mario 3D*, *Animal Crossing 3D*, *Fire Emblem* and *Super Smash Bros* are also on the way.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, though. In addition to everything here, there's *Diablo III*, *Max Payne 3* and *Ninja Gaiden 3*; two new *Silent Hill* games in *Downpour* and the Vita-only *Book Of Memories*; *Metal Gear Rising: Revengeance* from Platinum Games; Square Enix's *Tomb Raider* reboot; a new *Hitman* game; an HD release of *Final Fantasy X*; *Ridge Racer Unbounded*, and much more. The following 11 months are going to be extremely busy. *

Three To Watch

» The big titles that we're keeping a close eye on

Tomb Raider



We're getting rather excited about Crystal Dynamics' reboot of *Tomb Raider*. After producing totally acceptable adventures in the form of *Legend* and *Underworld*, this sees Lara heading off for an exciting, altogether more deadly, adventure. Effectively an origin story, neatly ignoring some of Lara's more disappointing games, *Tomb Raider* features a heavy emphasis on survival horror, with Lara having to scramble around for makeshift weapons while avoiding dangerous indigenous locals. It appears to be borrowing elements from *Uncharted*, most notably in the way it handles cut-scenes, but considering how well that worked for Naughty Dog, we see it as no bad thing.

Silent Hill HD Collection



There might only be two games included in the package, but one of them is quite simply the finest adult videogame ever made. The themes of *Silent Hill 2* are incredibly deep, complex and mature, and no other horror game has yet managed to better them. Aside from issues surrounding the voiceovers – the original actor who portrayed James Sunderland wasn't happy that his voice and motion capture were being used without his permission – that have now been resolved, very little is known about the actual port, other than that it's by Hijinx Studios. Here's hoping it's been getting remastering advice from Bluepoint Games.

Luigi's Mansion 2



Luigi's Mansion was one of the most underrated games on the GameCube, so it's highly gratifying to know that the sequel will soon be here. While the core gameplay mechanics are very similar to the original game, *Luigi's Mansion 2* will feature additional mansions for Mario's brother to explore. It also looks fantastic, with some stunning lighting effects and clever 3D, which creates a lovely sensation of depth. Nintendo has kept relatively quiet about additional improvements, but the core gameplay was pretty solid to begin with, so we'll be expecting subtle tweaks rather than a dramatic overhaul. To be fair, though, we'd have been perfectly happy with a port of the original.

THE RETRO DEBATE

» What are you most looking forward to?

VISIT **RETROGAMER.NET/FORUM** TO HAVE YOUR SAY

theantmeister
I'm really looking forward to *Luigi's Mansion 2*. The first one sold me on the GameCube. The level of detail and character in that game was phenomenal. Can't wait for the sequel!

ShadowMan
Street Fighter X Tekken is the one I'm looking forward to. Still not sure if Capcom will manage to translate Namco's fighters well into a 2D fighter, but I'm eager to give it a go either way, plus Hugo and Rolento are back. I'm also looking forward to *Max Payne 3*.

DPrinny
Kind of interested in seeing how bad *Syndicate* is.

Mire Mare
I thought the GameCube's arguably underrated *Luigi's Mansion* was brilliant. I'm looking forward to seeing what Nintendo can do with this. If it gets the care and attention that *Mario* got in *Galaxy 1* and *2*, it could be stellar. The only problem, for me, is that it looks like a 3DS-only game.

thebear
Diablo III. But as with any time an old classic series comes back, I wait with a mixture of nervousness and excitement in case they mess it up.

Morkin
Luigi's Mansion 2 most definitely, as I adored the GameCube one.

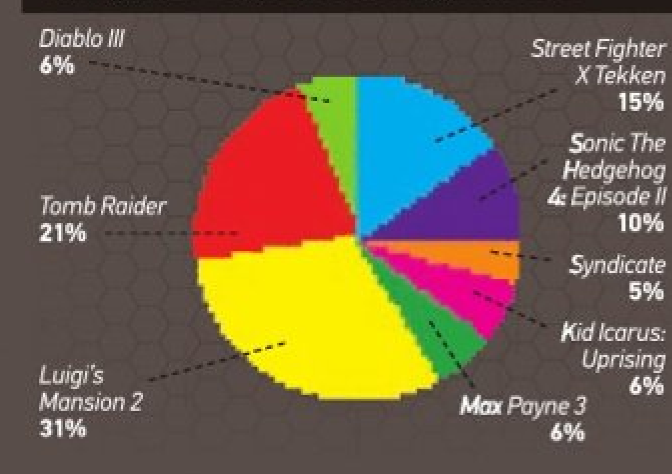
nakamura
Luigi 2, as it looks utterly charming. *Street Fighter X Tekken* would be more interesting the other way around, as Capcom has put too many fighters out that are similar. Prefer a *Tekken* take on *SF* myself.

SoupDragon
Luigi's Mansion for me, followed by Mr Payne.

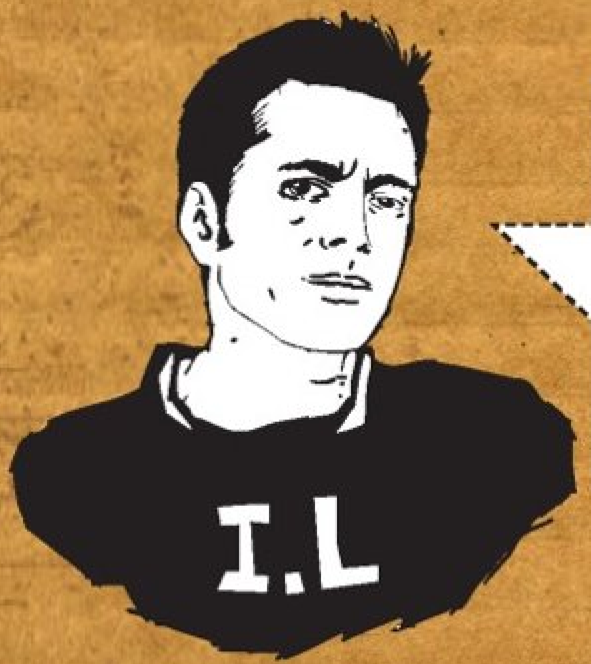
PaulEMoz
Wow. I'm not looking forward to anything in that poll!

FORUM OPINION

What games are you most looking forward to?



Here's the bio...
Iain Lee is a freelance broadcaster who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. He used to present the 11 O'Clock Show, but please don't hold that against him. You can find more information about Iain at **www.iainlee.com**



Hi there. My name's **Iain Lee**. You might remember me from Thumb Bandits and The 11 O'Clock Show, but now I'm here to confess my love for retro gaming

I'm a man now, Mummy

Was there a point when you gave up on computer games? A moment when you caught yourself playing *Jet Set Willy* and thought: 'I'm not enjoying this as much as I used to. In fact, I feel like a bit of a dick, and instead of concentrating on the game, I'm actually thinking more about girls/blokes/booze/cars/drugs/telly/exams/a career/military hardware/*15 To 1*'?

There was for me and I remember it vividly. I was in WHSmith, standing by the now very much reduced games section. Before, it had been a sprawling third of the shop on Slough High Street, rivalled only by the slightly bigger section that was in Boots. In fact, Boots was my Saturday morning haunt of choice; it just felt that little bit classier. Smiths was always a tad downmarket for me, although always preferable to John Menzies, partly because you had to go to Uxbridge for Menzies, and partly because Menzies was crap.

Anyway, now the Smiths game section was woeful. A small rack of badly organised cassettes were all that remained of this once great empire. I saw the new *Superman* game for the BBC Micro – I've just checked, and this dates it at around 1989, possibly 1990 – and like one of Pavlov's dogs, I started salivating and getting a bit excited.

I fingered it – steady, that's a legitimate description and nothing mucky – and fantasised about getting it home and playing with it – that one is a lazy description and is deliberately a bit mucky – but I realised that, actually, this excitement wasn't genuine. In fact, the real feeling I had was of emptiness, spiritual shallowness and a keen sense that I was getting older and had moved on from such childish things. My life as a man was stretching out in front of me and no longer would videogames play a part in that journey.

Sadly, but with a sense of manly purpose, I placed the cellophane-wrapped cassette back on the shelf and walked from WHSmith, out into the bright sunlight of a busy Slough High Street. And then went and had a Burger King. There really is nothing finer than a BK Spicy Bean Burger. In fact, I once had three in one sitting, the second and third separated only by a visit to the loo.

I think that weekend I boxed up the Beeb and shoved it in the attic. I wasn't quite ready to chuck it out yet, almost as if something inside me knew that my gaming days weren't really over. But for the next seven or eight years, I really didn't do much gaming. Sure, there was the odd *Sonic* session, but at the time I frowned upon the SNES and Mega Drive as being little more than kids' toys. It wasn't until I saw *WipEout* on the Sega Saturn that my gaming mojo was whetted once more.

Am I unique? In many ways, yes, but in this respect I think not. I suspect a few of you out there have, at some point, turned your back on gaming. But we are back now, and I guess that's all that matters.



Smiths was always preferable to John Menzies, partly because Menzies was crap

SHENMUE CITY GETS DEMOLISHED

YS NET CALLS TIME ON SHENMUE CITY AFTER JUST ONE YEAR

YS Net, the studio formed and headed by legendary Sega game designer Yu Suzuki, has closed down its *Shenmue City* project after just 12 months.

Released exclusively in Japan in December 2010, *Shenmue City* (known as *Shenmue Gai* in Japan) was viewed by many fans as the spiritual successor to the never-released *Shenmue Online*, and also a beacon of hope that *Shenmue III* may finally see the light of day.

The social game, which is best described as a side story to the two main games in the series, was released via Yahoo Japan's Yahoo Mobage service, with a PC version also planned.

Taking place around the time of the first *Shenmue* chapter, *Shenmue City* allowed users to take on the role of an original character in the action RPG, embarking on missions and interacting with familiar characters from the series. The social aspect came from users setting up their own dojo and competing and battling with other players online.

The news of the service's closure was announced on YS Net's official website, as the studio thanked patrons for their support.

The reason behind the decision remains unclear, but there is a glimmer of hope for *Shenmue* supporters still clinging on to the prospect of Ryo one day finally seeing closure on his revenge mission.

Speaking in a video interview to French fan site Shenmue Master (**shenmuemaster.fr**), Suzuki recently commented that he can obtain the *Shenmue* licence from Sega, and teased fans with a few details about the story of the third game, should it ever get made.





» Though it was only released in Japan, *Shenmue City*'s termination will surely come as a huge blow to *Shenmue* fans around the world.

MICROBYTES

Snippets of news from the exciting world of retro



>> Road Avenger motors onto the SNES

The Mega-CD favourite has been ported to the Super Nintendo by dforce3000, weighing in at a colossal 6816Mb (148 times the size of the biggest SNES games). The demo is made possible thanks to the MSU1 Media Enhancement Chip, which gifts the SNES 4GB of extra storage space and FMV playback, and is soon to be made available through a new flash cart. You can see a video of dforce's efforts at RetroCollect: **tinyurl.com/6nawblh**



>> Clearing up the past

Two of gaming's most confusing stories and timelines have finally been unravelled by their makers. The new official *Metal Gear Solid* website features a slick interactive timeline that offers a potted rundown of key aspects in the series' story. In other similar news, Nintendo has finally published an official *Zelda* timeline. It appears inside the *Hyrule Historia*, an art book released in Japan to tie in with the series' 25th anniversary.

Readers needed

Choose your favourite moments for Retro Gamer's 100th issue

As **Retro Gamer** approaches its 100th issue, we wanted to put together a feature that all our readers could be involved with. Videogames are filled with great moments, so defining that they stick in the memory of everybody that experiences them. Maybe you were stunned the first time Psycho Mantis made that joypad move in *Metal Gear Solid*, or perhaps the first time you successfully docked a spaceship in *Elite* has always stayed with you. Whatever it is, we want to know about it so we can put together a definitive list. And, who knows, your personal entry might actually get included. Send your entry to **retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk**.

You can list as many moments as you like, but they need to be moments everyone will have experienced, not just personal achievements like finally beating a boss. We've included a couple of examples to give you an idea.

Darran

To me, one of the greatest moments in games is the downhill run on *Strider*'s second level. As you climb to the summit of a mountain, the music builds beautifully; you then tear down the mountainside with explosions biting at your heels, before leaping over a huge chasm. Even now, I still get goosebumps playing it.



Stuart

Christmas time in *Shenmue* was a memorable moment; seeing the snow fall, a drunken Santa appear and the shopkeepers of Dobuita prepare for the holiday by hanging bunting and decorations. It's a highlight that you know is coming and you anxiously await, and doesn't disappoint when it arrives.

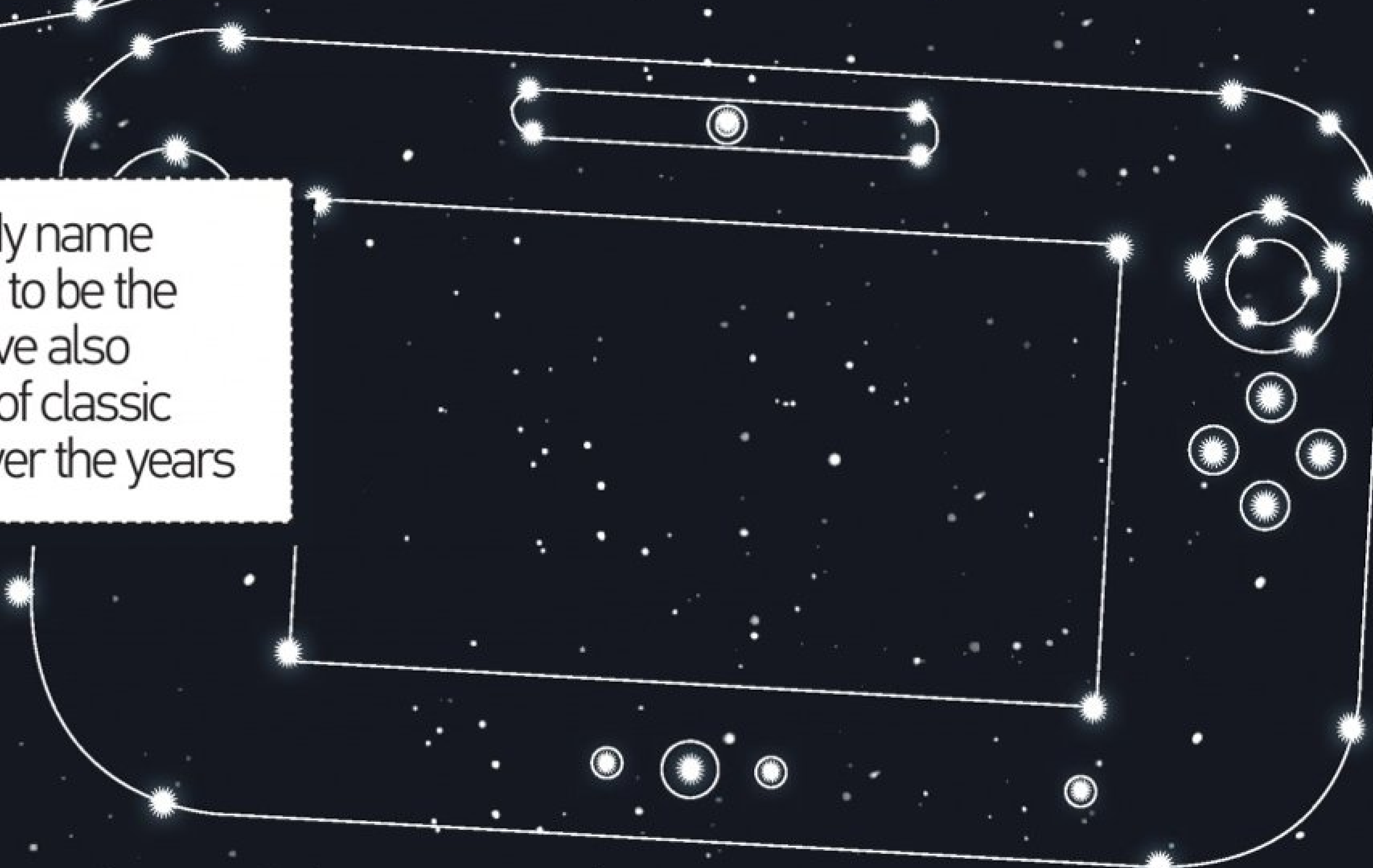


retro columns

>> PAUL DAVIES GIVES HIS VIEWS ON THE RETRO WORLD

Here's my bio...
In 1992 I started out on *Mean Machines Sega* and *Nintendo Magazine System*. In 1995 I became editor of *C&VG*. I led the *C&VG* website from 1998 until Christmas 2000, then I left journalism to be concept design manager at Criterion Games. I returned to journalism in 2002 and from 2005 I've been running my own company, Unlikely Hero.







Seven

Apparently life breaks down into natural seven-year cycles. It's got to be the same for videogames.

Let's see. Seven years ago saw the arrival of the Nintendo DS and Sony PSP. In 1998 Sega brought us the Dreamcast. Nintendo launched the Super Famicom in 1991. Seven years before that the Sinclair QL came out. I'm not sure that would be the best place to start really, but it kind of works.

If you fiddle with the dates a little bit, which I know is cheating, the seven-year cycles are roughly: home computers (Spectrum, Commodore 64, BBC, etc); 8-bit consoles (NES, Master System, PC Engine); 16-bit consoles (Mega Drive, Super NES); disc-based super-consoles (PlayStation, Dreamcast); and then, broadly speaking, the current generation of mega-amazing consoles and monster PCs.

Yes, all right; this experiment isn't working precisely to plan. And it's boring. So, I'm going to throw in the spiritual element to make things interesting. My theory now is that the coolest games machines arrive, like legendary heroes, in times of need. This would also mean that when they're not needed, they're never cool. And to prove this theory let's consider the Dragon 64, Acorn Electron, Sega 32X, Atari Jaguar and... umm... Nokia N-Gage. All fairly tidy machines, but who needs 'em really?

The right time for a new games machine is written in the stars, you know, like it has been foretold. You might think that it has something to do with the life cycle of a microchip, hitting the cost curve at just the right time, satisfying the shareholders and so much serious business. I prefer to believe in a bigger mystery, gamer destiny, which cannot be rushed for the sake of anyone's bottom line.

Try putting your third eye to the test here. In 2012 we're going to get the Vita and Wii U to mess around with. Some say a new Xbox and PlayStation too. I'm saying nothing, just asking the question: are you ready? Is the world ready? What do you think the universe is saying about the PS Vita and Wii U? Feel this in your heart of hearts. Are you crying out for the Xbox 720? PlayStation 4?

The natural order of things, just think about it. 2012, according to this theory, is likely to be the most incredible year in videogames. Probably the Mayans saw this coming and we misinterpreted their predictions. The world isn't going to end; we're just going to take the year off work to play awesome videogames. Don't ask where the money's coming from because I have no idea. But, since ancient times, it has been written. 2012: gaming nirvana. Can't wait.

In celebration, I suggest dragging out your old computers and consoles, dusting off the cartridges, disks and tapes, and finding a TV that'll run an Atari VCS without making it look like total shit. Read through all your back issues of **Retro Gamer**. Finish everything that you started, get the secret ending screen, save all the cute animals, choose the dark side then the good, nail that combo and achieve your best ever kill/death ratio. Feel the power rising. You're going to need every last drop.

2012 could be the reason we're all here.

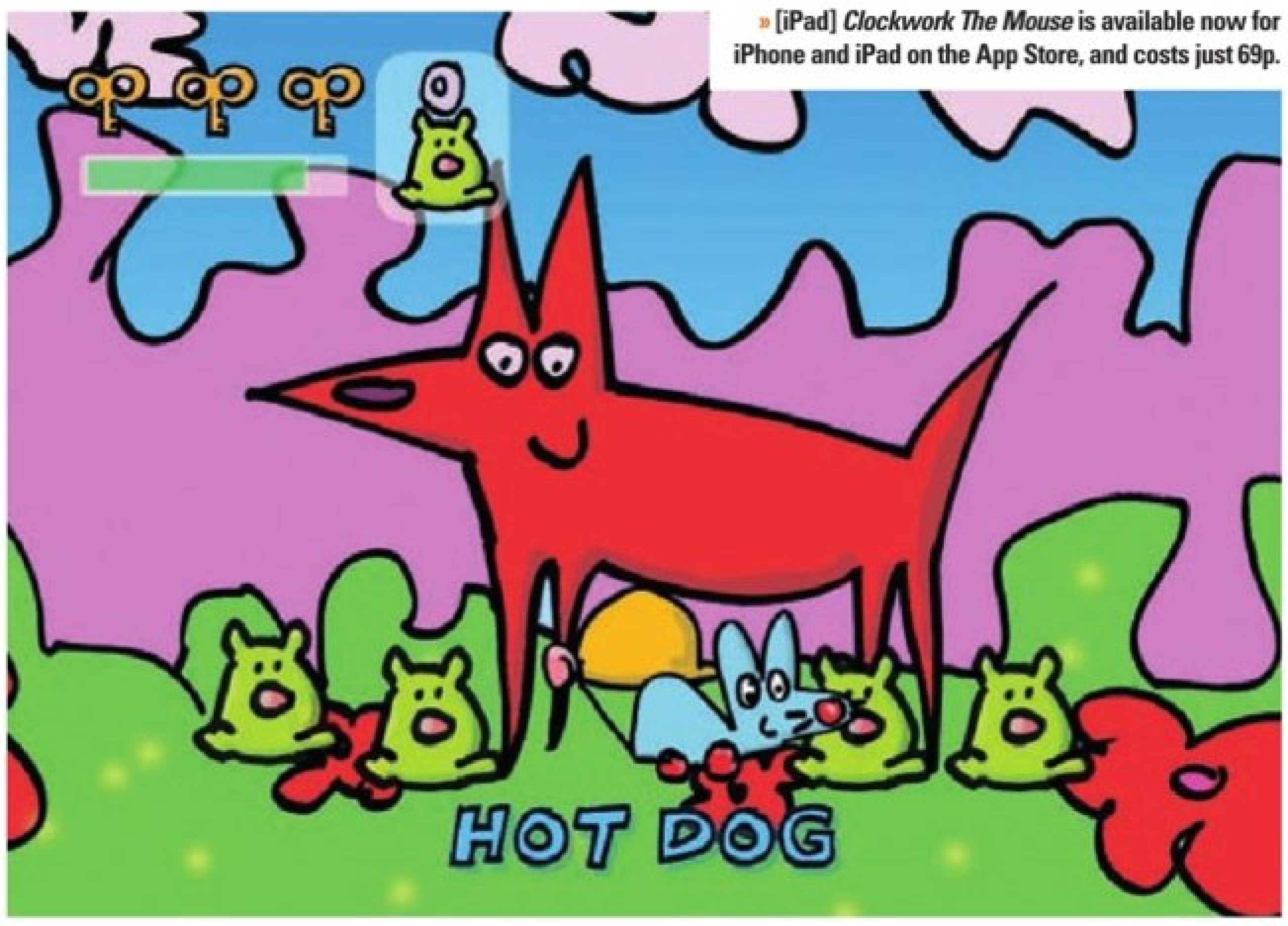
Just how much brandy did my mum put in that Christmas pudding anyway?

> The world won't end; we'll just take the year off work to play awesome games

ROCK STAR ATE MY MOUSE

ROCK STAR ATE MY HAMSTER CREATOR COLIN JONES DISCUSSES HIS NEW iOS PROJECT AND RETURN TO THE GAMES INDUSTRY AFTER 20 YEARS

After writing cult music management sim *Rock Star Ate My Hamster* and the *Dizzy*-esque cartoon adventure game *Slightly Magic*, Colin Jones bid the games industry an unexpected farewell to focus on musical projects away from games. Well, after 20 years, Colin returns with *Clockwork The Mouse*, a beautiful hand-drawn cartoon adventure for the iPhone and iPad that makes use of the devices' tilt-screen controls. We spoke to Colin to learn more, and to find out what has inspired his decision to revisit games after two decades.



» [iPad] *Clockwork The Mouse* is available now for iPhone and iPad on the App Store, and costs just 69p.

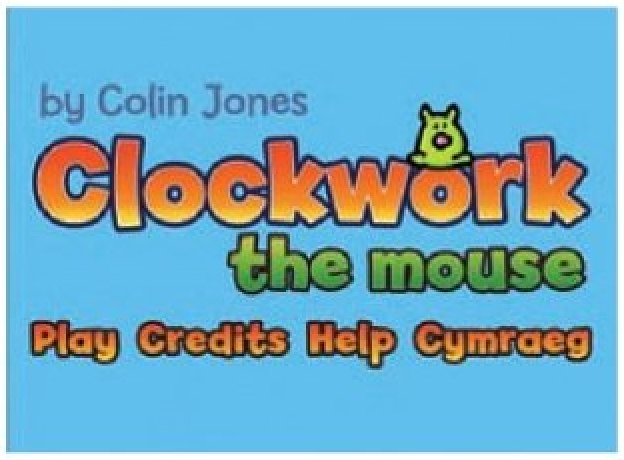
Retro Gamer: It's been 20 years since your last game, *Slightly Magic*. What motivated your return?
Colin Jones: To be honest, because I'm allowed to. Apps, thanks to Apple's lead, have left the door open for small indie developers like myself to start up where we left off. It's just like tomorrow was going to be, all those years ago. I just skipped a bit – like 20 years. The blink of an eyelid. Another thing, which I can't stress too highly, is that this is actually where it's at. There's no better space to create stuff in at the moment. And it doesn't have to be games, you know.

RG: Tell us about your new company, Potassium Frog, and your new game, *Clockwork The Mouse*.
CJ: Potassium Frog is a label that lets me work on a number of different types of games, while keeping some sort of identity. As to *Clockwork The Mouse*, I wanted a character that would work in a certain games environment. If you tilt the screen he'll move down the slope; tilt it back and he'll move the other way. He fits into this tactile world where you tap on different parts of the screen to hear characters talk and pick things up. He led me into this other world, where you can allow yourself to have small adventures. Once you've finished, the game's done – you'll never go back. But when you're in there, playing the game, you get to spend some time in a beautiful environment with interesting characters. It's a great way to pass the time.

RG: When did you start on the project and how long has it taken?
CJ: I must have started in February 2011 and carried on through the rest of the year. It seems a long time, but you have to trust your instincts sometimes. I had a lot to learn. I took up running around the same time as a hobby. I ran my first half marathon in October. *Clockwork* ran parallel as another kind of half marathon.

RG: Has it been difficult for you to get back into coding after such a long absence and have you discovered that you've missed it at all?
CJ: I cannot believe how much I've enjoyed writing this game. I'm so glad to be back. I get up in the morning with a spring in my step. It's a joy, honestly.

RG: Finally, what's next? Any chance of *Rock Star*, or a spiritual sequel, appearing on iOS?
CJ: It'd be fun to shake things up a bit. Things can get a little boring if we're not careful. That's the sort of thought that gets me into trouble, you know? *Rock Star* did not have an easy ride. I'm actually very excited at the position I find myself in. I've got a bunch of ideas that I want to play around with. If I throw them up in the air and watch how they land I might be able to put something interesting together. Who knows? ✱







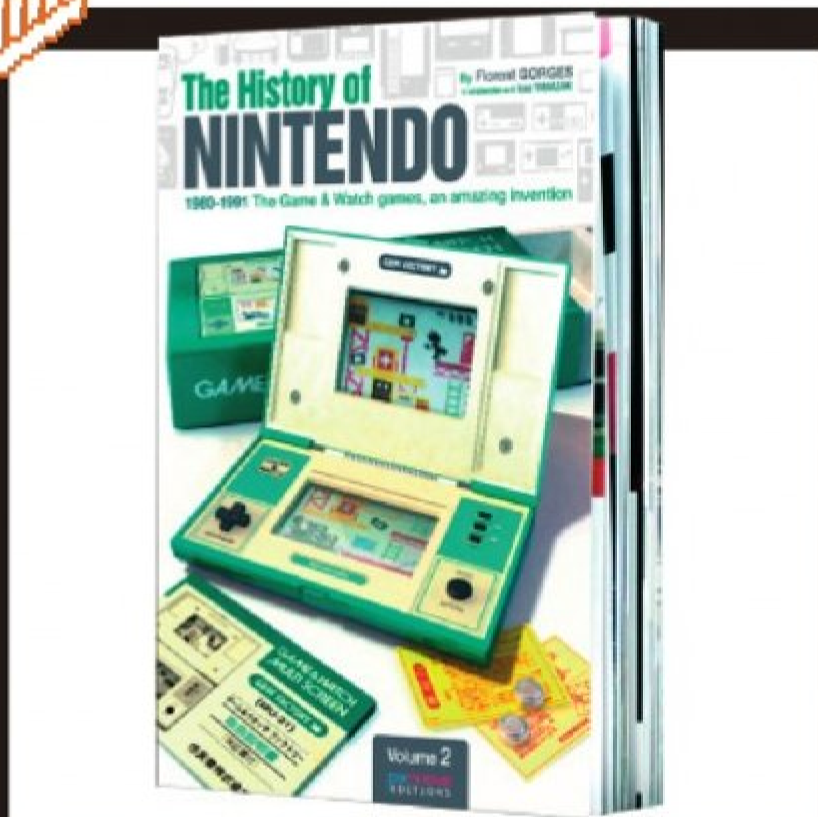
MIGHT & DELIGHTFUL

Might & Delight, the indie developer formed from defunct Swedish studio Grin (*Bionic Commando, Bandits: Phoenix Rising*) has finally announced its first game, a gorgeous platformer dubbed *Pid* that has tight and challenging retro gameplay at its core. Looking like a cross between *Limbo* and Grin's *Bionic Commando Rearmed*, the digital title will see players helping a schoolboy escape a dangerous alien world inhabited by robots. Boasting stunning hand-drawn visuals, co-op gameplay and gravity-meddling mechanics, it's certainly piqued our interest, so expect further updates in the coming months.

THE VAULT

TREASURES FROM THE RETRO CHEST

TREASURE OF THE MONTH



The History Of Nintendo: Volume 2

- **RRP:** £24.99 (free shipping)
- **Buy it from:** www.pixnlovepublishing.co.uk

Florent Gorges' first volume offered detailed and fascinating insight into arguably the most influential videogame developer of all time. In fact, it was so comprehensive that this second part of its history focuses entirely on Nintendo's Game & Watch games. It chronicles the portable's development, the impact the mighty miniatures had on the industry, and provides full analysis of all the games in the series across 200 pages filled with over 1,500 images. In short, it's essential reading for Nintendo and handheld lovers.

Needlemouse T-Shirt

- **RRP:** $24.00 (approx £15)
- **Buy it from:** www.meatbun.us

We will continue to sing Meat Bun's praises for as long as it continues to produce must-wear retro T-Shirts. Well, we were pleased to spot that the guys have recently added a few more fresh designs to their growing range, and they're all superb. Among our favourites is this classic looking Sonic tee, which has been inspired by the hedgehog's early beginnings, as well as those of a certain popular cartoon mouse. It's a great concept and an essential purchase for Sonic fans.





Atari Flashback 3 Classic Game Console

- **RRP:** £36.97
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

Cause pandemonium in your household by removing the Xbox 360 from under the telly and telling the kids that you traded it with the milkman for a bottle of silver top and one of these Atari plug-and-play consoles. Then sit back and watch the tears roll faster than Sonic. Styled to look in keeping with the woody VCS, these mini consoles come packed with two controllers and 60 Atari games built in – including *Missile Command* and *Yars' Revenge* – to offer hours of classic Atari gaming.

Retro Pin Badges

- **RRP:** £1.00 each
- **Buy it from:** www.retrogt.com

There isn't much to say about pin badges really. Invented by *Blue Peter* as an affordable competition prize, the first was successfully launched into space in June 1984, and the most expensive sold at an auction in 1996 for £3.12. These 38mm pin badges from RetroGT come in a variety of different retro themed designs, from a ZX Spectrum to a 1-UP symbol and even an old pirate-friendly cassette tape, ensuring all tastes and gaming creeds are catered for.





iPhone 4 Game Boy Case

- **RRP:** £4.99
- **Buy it from:** www.amazon.co.uk

If you've treated yourself to a snazzy new iPhone 4 recently why not make it cooler to the power of Game Boy by slipping it into one of these durable and flexible silicone skins? They're perfect for protecting it from scuffs, unplanned pregnancies and annoying airborne elements such as dust and other people's sweat vapour. They're lightweight and also offers no loss in functionality. The only drawback we've been able to spot is you can't play *Link's Awakening* through them.

retroradar

>> GIVE US TWO MINUTES AND WE'LL GIVE YOU THE RETRO WOR



*A MOMENT WITH...

Jonathan Temples

A slight misunderstanding over the origins of CJ The Elephant led to this month's interview. Darran Jones speaks to the man once known as Jonathan Smythe

Who is Jonathan Temples?

Jonathan started gaming with a VIC-20 at the age of 12. He created graphics for many C64 games, most notably the *CJ* series for Codemasters and Thalamus' *Nobby The Aardvark*. He's recently returned to game design with his new company, Infurious Republic.

If you could recommend one of your games, what would it be?
Nobby The Aardvark. When David [Clarke] and I started this project, the Amiga was starting to take the limelight, but we knew that the C64 still had a few tricks left up its sleeve. This was my last project and the things we did pushed the C64 to its limits.

What's your proudest gaming memory?
CJ's Elephant Antics hitting the budget charts and *Zzap!64* giving it a silver medal award and a rating of 94%. My friend Gary Coates used to work in a computer games shop in Belfast and we spent days just looking at it on his shop shelf.

What's the most difficult thing you've encountered while working on a game?
Well, the C64 was a dream machine to work on but if you coded a game with the rules of the official Commodore 64 programmers guide then you were stuck.

Which industry veteran do you admire?
Bob Stevenson. What this man did with graphics on the C64 was unbelievable. I could list all of his games, but my top three are *Myth*, *IO* and *Delta*. His animations were never lazy or predictable. He was always able to bring the character alive on screen, but with so few pixels.

How would you like to be remembered?
I would like to be remembered as a C64 artist who didn't conform to the normal way of animating on the C64.

What game do you wish you were involved in?
Codemasters offered David and I *Micro Machines* and we said no thanks, and guess what? It made a mint!

What opportunities has making games given you?
After *Nobby The Aardvark* I went into graphic design after college, and it never excited me the way gaming did. But now with Apple and apps I'm going back to developing games. I believe I've been given a second chance, and the app games are so close to the C64 gaming scene that I just have to get back into it right now.

What's your darkest memory of being in the games industry?
I did graphics once and never got paid; the person now works for a leading global games company. I had worked on a few projects with him and this was his last so he must have thought, 'I don't need Jonathan any more', and that was that. This was a costly lesson in my early years.



» [C64] Jonathan and Dave were originally meant to do the arcade port of *The New Zealand Story* but turned it into *CJ* when the deal fell through.

> "Bad idea letting lads from Belfast stand beside a fridge full of free beers!"

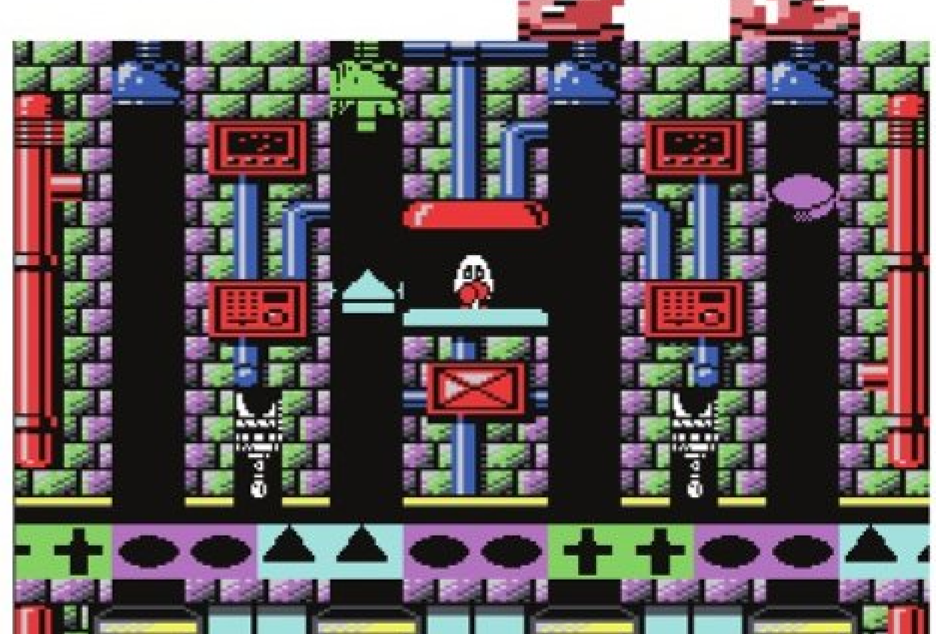
And your best?
David, Ashley [Hogg] and I were asked by Codemasters to attend their Earls Court gaming show stand and talk to clients. I think this was a bad idea letting lads from Belfast stand beside a fridge that housed a large collection of free beers. I loved London, but what a hangover!

How has the industry changed in the past 20 years?
The industry has changed from small indie games to massive, movie-like productions, with over a hundred people working on a game. David left the scene when he no longer got any enjoyment out of coding parts of a game. I'm getting the C64 excitement all over again, as the app scene has room for small games. I believe this will lead to the much-needed change in gaming that made the C64 scene so refreshing.

Look out for my new games company, Infurious Republic, as we have a lot of projects in the pipeline for 2012 and all in a 2D retro style with the old C64 theme. Our first game is *DestructANT* and is out now. It's a retro-style game with cutesy graphics and addictive gameplay with a green angry frog. *







3 February – 1 March

retrodiary

>> A month of retro events both past and present



3 February 2012
■ The UK release of *SoulCalibur V* on Xbox 360 and PS3 is expected in stores.



3 February 2012
■ Square Enix are due to release *Final Fantasy XIII-2* on Xbox 360 and PS3.



4 February 1943
■ Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari Inc, is born.



4 February 2003
■ Get your bongos out for the UK release of *Donkey Kong Jungle Beat* on the GameCube.



5 February 2005
■ Out for the Game Boy Advance, gamers get to see the newest *Donkey Kong* game, *DK King Of Swing*.



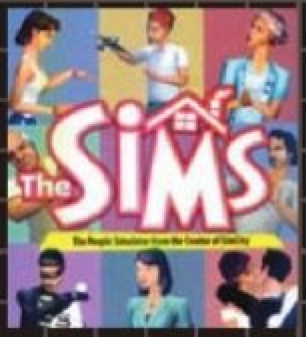
8 February 2008
■ Electronic Art's *Medal Of Honor* series continues with *Heroes 2*, released across Europe on the Wii.



10 February 2006
■ Developed by Hudson Soft and released by Nintendo, *Mario Party 7* for the GameCube is released.



10 February 2009
■ Released in Japan on WiiWare was *Bubble Bobble Plus*. It had the original 100 levels plus 100 completely new ones.



11 February 2000
■ Maxis and Electronic Arts introduce PC owners to the world of the Sims for the first time.



11 February 2005
■ Capcom release *Mega Man X8* on the PS2 in the UK and Europe.



14 February 2003
■ Happy Valentine's Day. Give your heart to someone by ripping it out, in *Mortal Kombat Deadly Alliance* released on GameCube.



16 February 2001
■ Square Enix release *Final Fantasy IX* across Europe. It was only available for PSone.



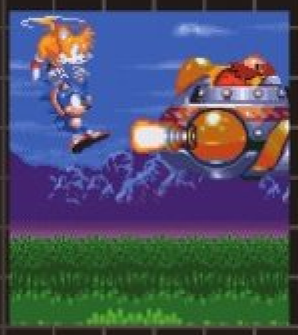
22 February 1996
■ *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament* receives a European release on the Super Nintendo.



22 February 2012
■ The upcoming new handheld console from Sony, the PlayStation Vita, is set to be released in the UK and USA.



24 February 1954
■ Sid Meier, programmer and designer of such strategy games as *Pirates!* and *Civilisation*, is born.



24 February 1994
■ Sega release *Sonic The Hedgehog 3* on the Mega Drive and introduce us to a new character, Knuckles the Echidna.



26 February 2011
■ Nintendo's newest handheld console, the 3DS, makes its worldwide debut in Japan.



27 February 1996
■ The first *Pokémon* game for Nintendo's Game Boy, *Pokémon Red*, is unleashed onto an unsuspecting Japanese public.



29 February 1988
■ Sega release a 3D version of their hit coin-op conversion *Space Harrier* on the Master System.



1 March 2012
■ New issue of **Retro Gamer** hits the streets.

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES


» [Arcade] Donkey Kong is back and imprisoned. Mario is back and playing the baddie. *Donkey Kong Jr* hits the arcades.

CHARTS

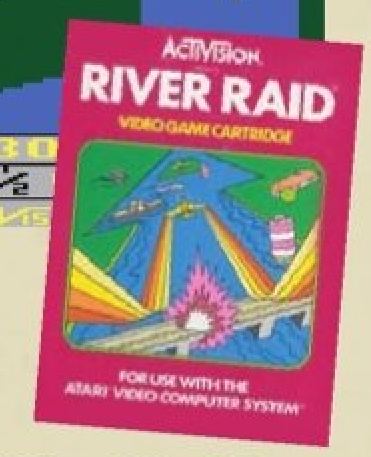
DECEMBER 1982

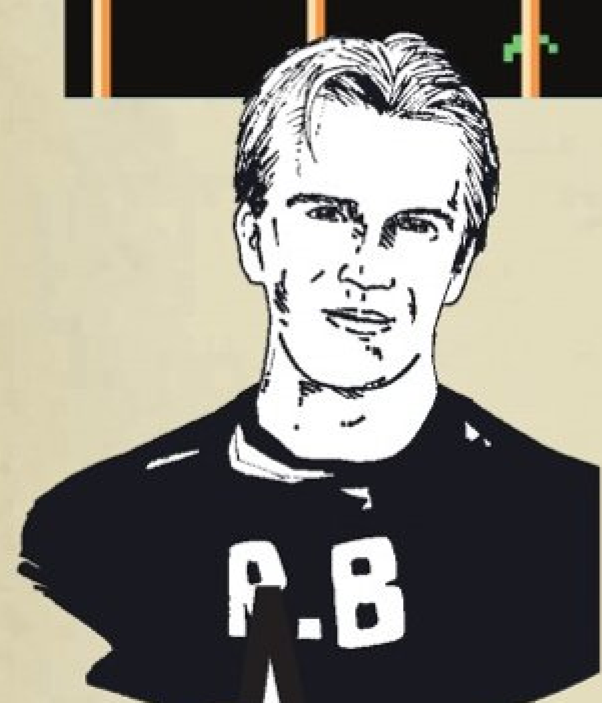
ZX81	
1	Mazeman (Abersoft)
2	3D Defender (JK Greye)
3	Mazogs (Bug-Byte)
4	Frogger (DJL Software)
5	3D Monster Maze (JK Greye)



» [2600] The magnificent *River Raid*. Not sure about the collision detection, though…







THE LATEST NEWS FROM DECEMBER 1982

DECEMBER 1982 – CRL grabbed by The Orbs, Silversoft shows enterprise, Mikro-Gen, E.T. arrives, Donkey Kong Jr hits the arcades while Galaxy Invader 10000 and Scramble hit tabletops. Richard Burton's batteries have run out again…

After suffering teething problems since release, the Sinclair Spectrum appeared to be taking a stranglehold in the home computing market. With reliability issues, staff striking at its manufacturing plant and delays in getting machines out in the past, the corner looked to have been turned with orders being fulfilled quickly and a new deal with WHSmith to stock the Spectrum in most of its stores after previously only being available through mail order.

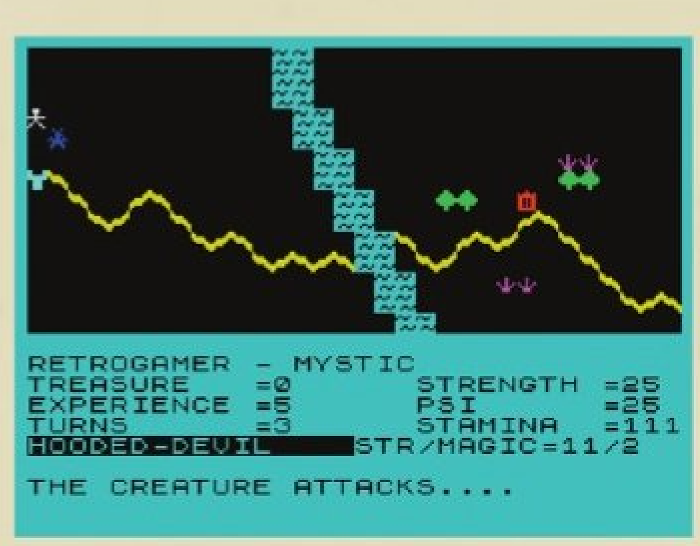
In a similar move, Jupiter Cantab, creator of the Jupiter Ace, announced that it had also moved away from mail order, with such illustrious retailers as Laskys and Debenhams taking stock of the machine.

The continuing trend for new computers due for release before Christmas but delayed until the new year struck again with the Acorn Electron. It was expected to be out for the Christmas sales push but joined the Oric-1 and Commodore 64 on the sidelines. Presumably Clive Sinclair was positively rubbing his hands together…

CRL announced its first wave of Spectrum games along with various Dragon 32 releases. Having had success in the ZX81 market, CRL naturally progressed onto the Spectrum with *Derby Day*, *Rescue*, *Jackpot* and *In Search Of The Orb*.

While pretty standard fare involving horse-racing and fruit machines, *The Orb*, a graphical role-playing adventure, was to cause problems. The game had been written by a freelance programmer and offered to CRL, which duly took it on and began production. Little did it know that *The Orb* infringed copyright of a game by Argus Specialist Press called *The Valley* by being virtually identical. Once Argus had spoken to CRL, *The Orb* was swiftly withdrawn and compensation paid.

New to Spectrum games was Silversoft, which announced a wave of new arcade games for imminent release. It wasn't surprising to see that the first three games were all conversions of popular coin-ops of the time, with *Orbiter* a clone of *Defender*, *Ground Attack* a version of *Scramble* and *Muncher* a take on *Pac-Man*. That said, they were all competent conversions.

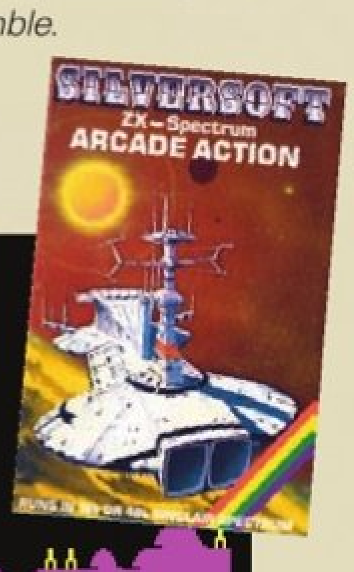


» [Spectrum] CRL's *In Search Of The Orb* was a rip-off of the Argus Press game *The Valley*. We smell compensation…

Silversoft also released *Starship Enterprise* (also on the BBC B), which was a tactical simulation heavily based on *Star Trek*. Similar games seemed to be becoming a sub-genre of simulations in its own right, such were the number of *Star Trek*-like releases coming out. None were officially sanctioned but used the same terminology as the TV series. Klingons on the starboard bow? You betcha.

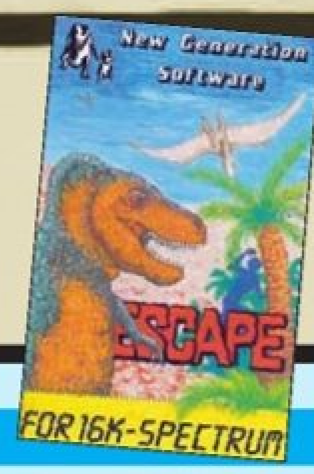
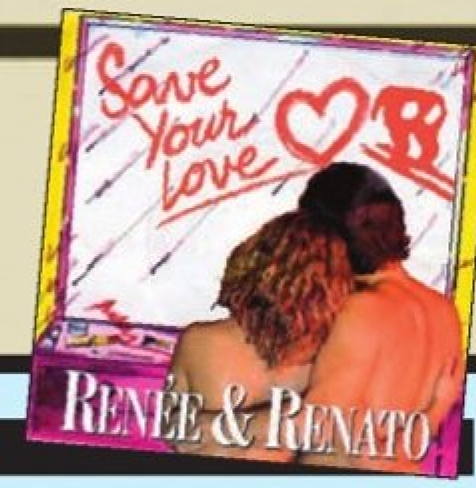
Another company moving on from the ZX81 was Mikro-Gen, which finally turned its hand to other 8-bit systems, releasing its first Spectrum game, *Scramble*.

Well, it's here. After much hyperbole and with anticipation running high,





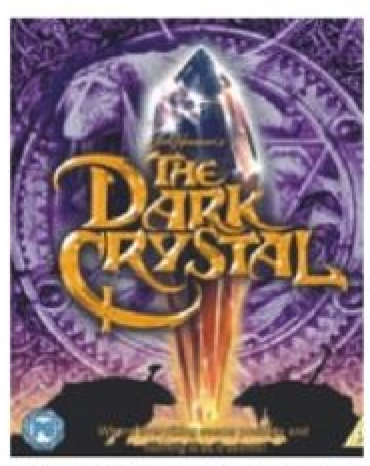
» [Spectrum] Part of Silversoft's initial foray into Spectrum territory was *Ground Attack*, a pleasant *Scramble* clone.

VIC-20	SPECTRUM	MUSIC
1 Adventureland (Commodore)	**1** Escape (New Generation Software)	**1** Save Your Love (Renee & Renato)
2 Omega Race (Commodore)	**2** Mazeman (Abersoft)	**2** Beat Surrender (Jam)
3 Rat Race (Commodore)	**3** Spectral Invaders (Bug-Byte)	**3** The Shakin' Stevens EP (Shakin' Stevens)
4 Grid Runner (Llamasoft)	**4** Meteor Storm (Quicksilva)	**4** Time (Clock Of The Heart) (Culture Club)
5 Andes Attack (Llamasoft)	**5** Niteflight (Hewson Consultants)	**5** Mirror Man (Human League)

DECEMBER 1982 NEWS

December was a memorable month for the movies. 17 December saw the release of *The Dark Crystal*, starring a cast of animatronic puppets and the voice talents of Jim Henson and Frank Oz, who jointly directed this family-oriented fantasy movie.



» *The Dark Crystal*; like *Labyrinth*, but without David Bowie.

The seventh movie of the *Pink Panther* series released in the UK on 3 December. *Trail Of The Pink Panther* was the last to feature Peter Sellers as Inspector Clouseau, as he had died 18 months earlier.

When Clouseau's plane crashes at sea, a French reporter, played by Joanna Lumley, begins interviewing Clouseau's past acquaintances. The movie makers then slotted in flashback scenes from previous movies to get as much Sellers in the movie as possible. It was panned, and rightly so. Still, it wasn't as bad as what Steve Martin did to the character…

9 December brought the release of the movie phenomenon known as *E.T.* A little boy called Elliott finds an alien. He decides to keep his new friend, hiding him away while trying to help him find a way to return home… which he does. With that, a money-making behemoth is born…

2 December saw the death of Marty Feldman, the British comedian who featured in movies such as *Young Frankenstein* and *The Adventures Of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother.* He was instantly recognisable with his protruding eyes caused by Graves' disease.

He died aged 48 from a heart attack in Mexico during filming of the comedy film *Yellowbeard*.

» Due for release before Christmas, the Acorn Electron was delayed until just after, handing Sinclair a seasonal head start.



» [2600] *E.T.* wasn't great. That said, fall down a pit and repeat indefinitely certainly didn't help its cause…



the official *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* videogame was released on the Atari 2600. With a reported $20 million having been spent by Atari to secure the rights alone, it had better sell well…

E.T.'s place in videogaming history is secure and everyone knows the story behind it. It was one of the first film tie-ins and the programmer, *Yars' Revenge* creator Howard Scott Warshaw, was given an implausibly tight deadline to create the game – just five weeks.

The game was such a colossal failure that it had a hand in bringing about Atari's demise and the videogame crash of 1983, but given the stupidly short development time and forgetting the high-profile subject matter and poor quality, was it really the biggest gaming failure ever?

It sold 1.5 million copies and was the fifth biggest-selling Atari 2600 game ever. Sounds impressive until you realise that upwards of another 3 million cartridges were left unsold. It left a huge financial hole in Atari's bottom line and the excess stock would later fill another huge hole… somewhere in the desert of New Mexico, with lashings of concrete.

Also for the 2600 and released by Activision was *River Raid*. One of the first vertical shoot-'em-ups, you were required to blast enemy ships, bridges and planes while watching your fuel supply. It would rightly become known as one of the best games to be released on the 2600. It was developed by Carol Shaw, one of a handful of female game designers at that time.

In coin-op land, the follow-up to the massively successful *Donkey Kong* was finally released. *Donkey Kong Jr* would follow a similar arcade platform formula to the original, but this time you play the part of Junior, who must rescue an imprisoned Donkey Kong, caged by the hero-turned-villain, Mario. It was the first and only time Mario became the baddie in a videogame.

It was well-received and became a popular machine in arcades. So much so that Nintendo later allowed ports to a wide variety of formats, including Intellivision, ColecoVision, Game & Watch, NES and several home micros. Thankfully Junior and his father would stick around for a very long time to come…

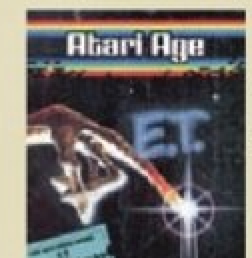
After the resounding success of *Astro Wars* and the recently released *Cave Man*, Grandstand had one further tabletop videogame for release pre-Christmas. This time it was *Scramble*.

Grandstand had once again licensed the game, with its *Scramble* being a rebadged version of Epoch's *Astro Command*. It was another brightly coloured game with a vacuum florescent display and an appetite for battery-guzzling, and it could be yours for around £25.

Grandstand's main UK competitor was CGL, and it also had a new game out for Christmas. The elegantly shaped *Galaxy Invader 10000* was the third in the series; a follow-up to the 1981 bestseller *Galaxy Invader 1000*, itself a sequel to the original *Galaxy Invader.* Although it was fast-paced and colourful, it didn't sell well, possibly due to not being different enough from the last incarnation. Gamers were beginning to drift away from space invaders.

THIS MONTH IN…

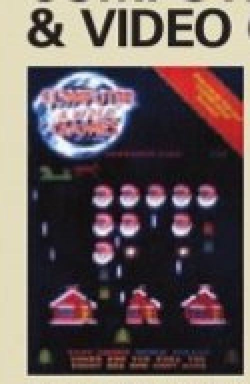
ATARI AGE



With *E.T.* on the cover, another 2600 movie tie-in game was also released, *Raiders Of The Lost Ark.* Despite being fairly average on all counts, it contained some interesting gameplay moments and a unique two-joystick control system – one to move Indy and one to manipulate your inventory.



COMPUTER & VIDEO GAMES



Being the Christmas issue, *C&VG* offered some advice on potential presents. Possible wants included *Big Trak, Super Simon, Caveman, Speak & Spell* and any number of Nintendo Game & Watch releases. Nostalgia overload!



YOUR COMPUTER



Your Computer magazine dissected and reviewed the CGL Sord M5. It fawned over the specs, commenting on its "stylish appearance and compact design" and declaring it a strong contender. In the home computer market? No. As a doorstop? More likely.



BACK TO THE NINETIES



» [Mega Drive] Bombs ahoy! *Bomberman* finally makes it to the Mega Drive, and it was certainly worth the wait.

» [PC] We're getting scoffed by aliens. Get in your ship and blast the Krellans before they chow down on your arse.



» [Mega Drive] The hedgehog and echidna are back for some piggyback cartridge gaming.



THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1994

OCTOBER 1994 – Online gaming with X-Band, expensive Mega Drive gaming with Wily Wars and Punisher, hedgehog gaming with Sonic & Knuckles and rubbish gaming with a new Lemmings release. Richard Burton plays it and jumps off a cliff…

Although Xbox Live and PlayStation Network were many moons away, the foundations for an online gaming network were laid with a small company called Catapult Entertainment and its X-Band modem.

Designed initially for the SNES, with versions following for the Genesis and Sega Saturn, the system would allow two players to hook up and play against each other from a range of compatible two-player games. Although there were only around 15 X-Band games for each console, they were mostly classics such as *Super Mario Kart* and *Super Street Fighter II* for the SNES, the *Mortal Kombat* series and *Doom* for the Genesis, and *Virtua Fighter Remix* and *Saturn Bomberman* for the Saturn.



» [SNES] *Super Mario Kart* was just one of several games that X-Band modem users could play online.

The earlier games on the SNES worked fine, but complex fighting games suffered latency issues due to the limitations of an early Nineties dial-up connection. Probably the most infamous offender was the SNES *Mortal Kombat 3*, which was rendered virtually unplayable. The Genesis and Saturn suffered from dial-up lag far less.

The system did very well in its early days, but as console technology and gaming moved on, it was shut down two and a half years later. There were hopes of releasing a UK version, but it never materialised.

A game you would think would be purpose-made for online gaming was the new release of *Mega Bomberman* on the Mega Drive. With other consoles having already had a taste of *Bomberman*, this was the first encounter with the fast-paced four-player game on the Mega Drive. Of course, if you had no friends then the one-player progressive puzzler was also great fun.





» [Mega Drive] *Mega Man: The Wily Wars* was a must-have compilation of the first three NES *Mega Man* games.

More superb gaming arrived on the Mega Drive in the form of *Mega Man* in the compilation release, *The Wily Wars*. Essentially this was the first three *Mega Man* games, released originally on the NES but smartened up by Capcom with new bonus sections and bosses for the Mega Drive gaming fraternity.

It was a cracking set of games but strangely never really sold that well. This could explain the current £100+ price tag for complete PAL versions on eBay.

Another game due out for the Mega Drive that would follow the same path of not selling well but costing a small fortune to buy on eBay today was *The Punisher*. Also released by Capcom, it was based on the Marvel Comics character with an option to also play as Nick Fury of SHIELD.

It was very much your standard side-scrolling beat-'em-up but did play better than most. Again, decent game, but lacklustre sales led to another future £100+ Mega Drive collectable.

There was yet more Mega Drive morning glory with the release of a new *Sonic The Hedgehog* game. *Sonic & Knuckles* reintroduced us to Knuckles the Echidna,

OCTOBER 1994 NEWS



» Raul Julia's last big budget film was this disappointing effort.

13 October brought to an end the Magellan space probe that had been sent to Venus to map the surface of the planet. Launched by NASA on 4 May 1989, the probe began mapping the planet in September 1990.

After conducting further experiments, Magellan suffered degradation of the power output, so NASA took the decision to crash it onto the surface of Venus, with readings from the descent through the Venusian atmosphere the final experiment of its five-year mission.

20 October saw a Hollywood legend die in Burt Lancaster, who passed away aged 80 after suffering a heart attack following a long bout of illness. Lancaster was left partly paralysed and with severe speech difficulties after having a stroke in 1990. His health never recovered from that point on.

On 24 October, Puerto Rican actor Raul Julia died at the age of 54. He was most famous for his role as Gomez Addams in two *Addams Family* movies in the early Nineties. His last Hollywood movie was *Street Fighter*, based on the videogame, in which he played General M Bison. He died before its release in December and, for most, his portrayal of Bison was one of the few redeeming features of the film.

21 October brought with it the UK release of Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction*, starring Samuel L Jackson and John Travolta. It was a massive critical hit and a box office smash, and rejuvenated Travolta's film career in the process.

who debuted in *Sonic 3* earlier in the year, and also a new development in Mega Drive formats – the lock-on cartridge.

This would allow *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *3* cartridges to be placed inside the *Sonic & Knuckles* cart. It could then access their data to combine games and allow access to extra features, such as playing as Knuckles in *Sonic 2*.

You could also play *Sonic 3* and *Sonic & Knuckles* as one continuous game, which was the original intention of Sega. Time limitations in development and *Sonic 3* growing so big meant Sega had to split the project into two parts, so it was nice to be able to play the game in its intended form.

One of the UK's most enduring software houses underwent a name change. After almost ten years in the business, Gremlin Graphics, maker of classic Eighties games such as *Monty On The Run* and *Bounder*, was to be renamed Gremlin Interactive.

Managing director Ian Stewart stated that there was often confusion about Gremlin Graphics being a graphics company rather than a software developer. With Gremlin entering into PC game development it seemed like the opportunity it needed to overhaul the company name and logo.



» [Amiga] *A Whole New World Of Lemmings* led to a whole new world of disappointment.

With that, Gremlin Interactive looked to have its first game ready for release before Christmas – *Retribution*, a PC game it labelled as an all-action science fiction combat game. The premise for *Retribution* was that Earth was in a right old state; everything was polluted and nations were on the brink of war, just to obtain a few remnants of farmable land.

Luckily, an alien race called the Krellans visits Earth and helps rebuild the planet, giving us advanced technology and making sure humans don't become extinct by helping us colonise other planets. Unluckily for the human race, the Krellans are also partial to a human kebab. We were being farmed by our benefactors… but now it's time to fight back…

With 44 missions spread over 11 campaigns fought across 11 different planetoids, the game was Gremlin's biggest and most ambitious project to date, and despite some great graphics and an interesting back story, it was little more than a decent shoot-'em-up.

Love them or hate them, they're coming back. A new *Lemmings* game from Psygnosis was pencilled in for release early in 1995, but a preview of the game, called *All New World Of Lemmings*, indicated that it would have a different feel from the normal *Lemmings* games.

Sadly, it was too much of a departure from previous instalments, with larger sprites and slightly different gameplay, not to mention ropey cursor controls, putting off many *Lemmings* fans.

In magazine land, *The One* reviewed the latest Amiga releases and rated *Theme Park* (Electronic Arts), *Club Football: The Manager* (Teque Software) and *Reunion* (Grandslam) as the must-have titles to splash your cash on this month.

THIS MONTH IN…

MEAN MACHINES SEGA



Hey, film fans – you hungry? For a freshly made movie consisting of ham (Raul Julia as Bison) and cheese (Jean-Claude Van Damme as Guile) with a little bit of sauce (Kylie Minogue as Cammy), the *Street Fighter* movie looked to be unique…



AMIGA FORMAT



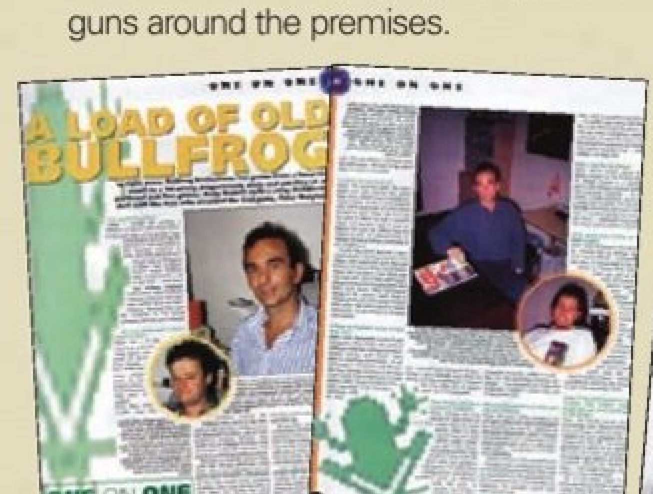
Team17 was putting the finishing touches to *Super Stardust* for the Amiga – a brash, colourful and fast-paced game, which was touted as being "*Asteroids* with knobs on". Supreme playability and the added bonus of superbly executed tunnel stages made *Super Stardust* a retro-inspired success.



THE ONE AMIGA

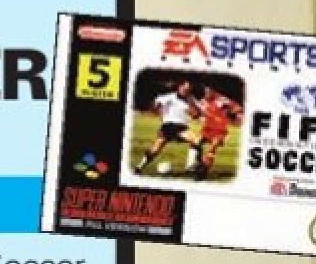


What strange worlds software houses live in. Bullfrog had problems with an old lady with haemorrhoids, and after relocating to a business park it was asked to move for playing with pellet guns around the premises.



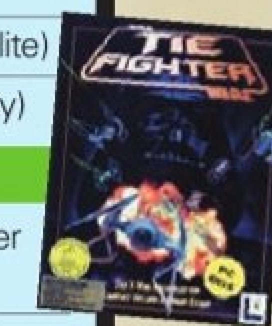
CHARTS

OCTOBER 1994



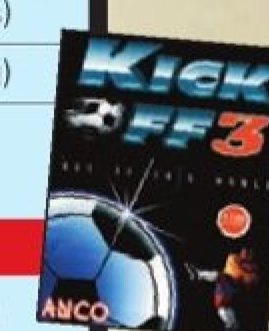
SNES

1. FIFA International Soccer (Electronic Arts)
2. World Cup USA '94 (US Gold)
3. Rock 'N Roll Racing (Interplay)
4. World Cup Striker (Elite)
5. Clayfighters (Interplay)



PC

1. Star Wars: TIE Fighter (LucasArts)
2. FIFA International Soccer (Electronic Arts)
3. SimCity 2000 (Maxis)
4. Theme Park (Bullfrog)
5. Cannon Fodder (Virgin Games)

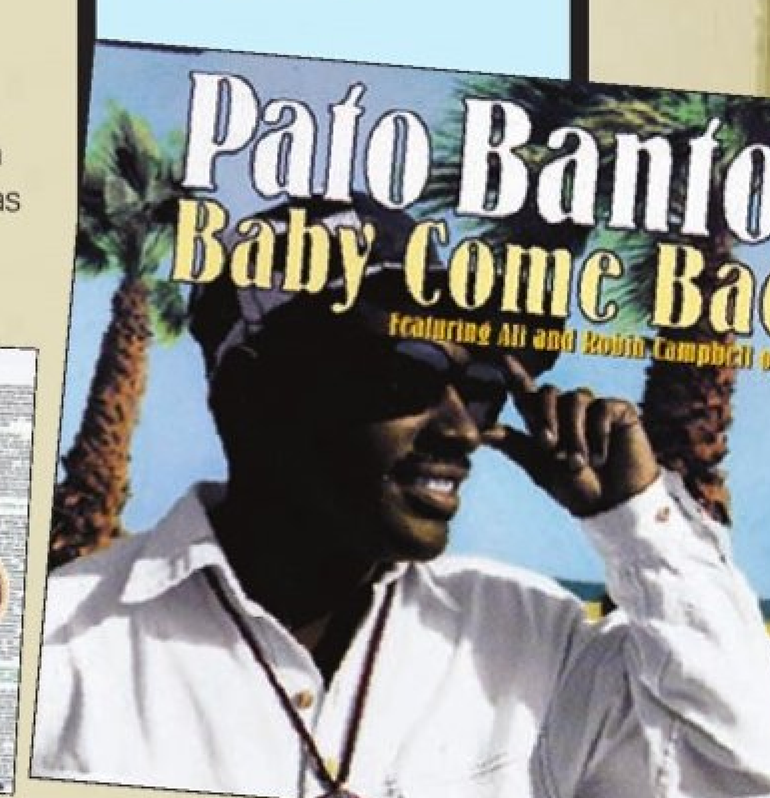


AMIGA

1. Kick Off 3: European Challenge (Anco)
2. Sensible Soccer International (Sensible Software)
3. World Cup USA '94 (US Gold)
4. Beneath A Steel Sky (Virgin Games)
5. Arcade Pool (Team17)

MUSIC

1. Baby Come Back (Pato Banton)
2. Saturday Night (Whigfield)
3. Always (Bon Jovi)
4. Sure (Take That)
5. Hey Now (Girls Just Want To Have Fun) (Cyndi Lauper)



RETRO GAMER.net READER'S REVIVAL

Planetoid

A CLONE WORTH DEFENDING

#47



» BBC MICRO
» ACORNSOFT
» 1982

Planetoid **on the BBC Micro was simply brilliant. It was such a good game that it made me feel pig sick as a Spectrum owner. It was the sort of arcade conversion of *Defender* that I could only dream about.**

I think initially it was called *Defender*, but this was soon stopped because *Defender* was obviously the arcade game. It's hard now to imagine a time when games manufacturers thought they could just copy someone else's game down to even giving it the same name.

I digress though… What was it about *Planetoid* that made it special? Well, it was damn near arcade perfect. It looked and sounded like *Defender*, and it played like *Defender*. Everything about it was superb, and as a 13-year-old boy all I wanted to do was to play *Donkey Kong* and *Defender* in my bedroom.

Why couldn't the Spectrum do *Defender* justice? It just couldn't. Half of my love of *Defender* comes from the noises that the original arcade machine made… listening to the hyperspace noise still sends shivers of nostalgia up my spine. The Spectrum's puny fart noises don't have quite the same effect. The Spectrum was better when it was actually innovating (*Knight Lore, Lords of Midnight, Jet Set Willy*) than when it was trying to copy arcade machines.

Back to *Planetoid*, and it was another game I had to go round to my posh friends' to play, while he told his father he was busy doing his Computer O-Level Project. That's the story of my childhood, really; playing computer games while lying to my own and other people's parents about what we were supposed to be doing with the computer.

Anyway, I've gone off track again… Just get hold of *Planetoid*, and play it, even under emulation. You can always tell your mum/dad/husband/wife/boss/whatever that you are working on an important Excel spreadsheet. ✱

RETROBATE PROFILE

» NAME: IAN MARKS
» JOINED: 17 AUG 2008
» LOCATION: EAST MIDLANDS
» OCCUPATION: NOT GIVEN
» FAVE GAME SYSTEM: ZX SPECTRUM

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THE MAKING OF 3D MONSTER MAZE

He may have made his brass from the muck of the Trashman series, but with 3D Monster Maze, Malcolm Evans created the stuff of nightmares. Paul Drury is sentenced to roam the maze forever in search of answers…

Malcolm Evans was a bedroom coder in the fine British tradition of the early Eighties. Yet he wasn't a typical one. There were three bodies in that room. And one of them was a monster.

"The ZX81 was in the bedroom and I was coding late into the night," recalls Malcolm, in hushed tones. "It was before I had sound in the game or the warning messages and suddenly the monster leapt out at me. I jumped out of my skin! My wife was in bed reading a book and she burst out laughing…"

Ah, but Malcolm was to have the last blood-curdling laugh, as he'd managed to create something on Sinclair's humble micro that few, if any, had done before: fear. His game, *3D Monster Maze*, programmed for the 16K version of Uncle Clive's sleek black beauty, cast the unwitting player into a complicated labyrinth with a single exit leading to freedom. But the player was not alone. Rex lay in wait. Rex was hunting for you. Rex had seen you. RUN! HE IS BEHIND YOU!

The sheer panic of being pursued by a gigantic Tyrannosaurus rex through those claustrophobic corridors, desperately trying to avoid being crushed in its huge jaws, left many a mental scar in the minds of a generation new to terror in three dimensions. The ZX81 had certainly inspired hundreds of school kids to realise their coding dreams. Few suspected that their nightmares might become pixelated reality too.

Like many teenage boys of the time, Malcolm had received his machine as a birthday present and was eager to teach his new toy some tricks. Except Malcolm was 37 years old. He had been working in the aerospace industry since the days of transistors and resistors, using such ancient machines as the PDP-8, employing his talents at GEC on the Black Arrow satellite project that launched in 1972. By the end of that decade he was employed at Sperry Gyroscope in Bristol, working on spacecraft and aircraft hardware, but decided it was time to venture into the embryonic software side of the industry and thus travelled to London seeking careers guidance from a professional advisor. "I spent the whole bloody day there doing tests, and at the end they said I was better off staying in the rut I was in," grumbles Malcolm. "I said I wanted to get into software, but the bloke shook his head and said, 'That's a young man's game. You'll be out of your depth.'"

Undeterred, Malcolm decided to throw himself in at the deep end. Coding in the evenings and at weekends, he began by creating a program that generated a random maze in 2D and then thought he might try to display it in 3D, so he could walk around his labyrinth from a first-person perspective. Given that most ZX81 games of the time featured a few flickering invaders stumbling across a static screen, wasn't this a somewhat foolhardy venture, Malcolm?

"I didn't know what was and wasn't possible," he shrugs. "I

THE MAKING OF

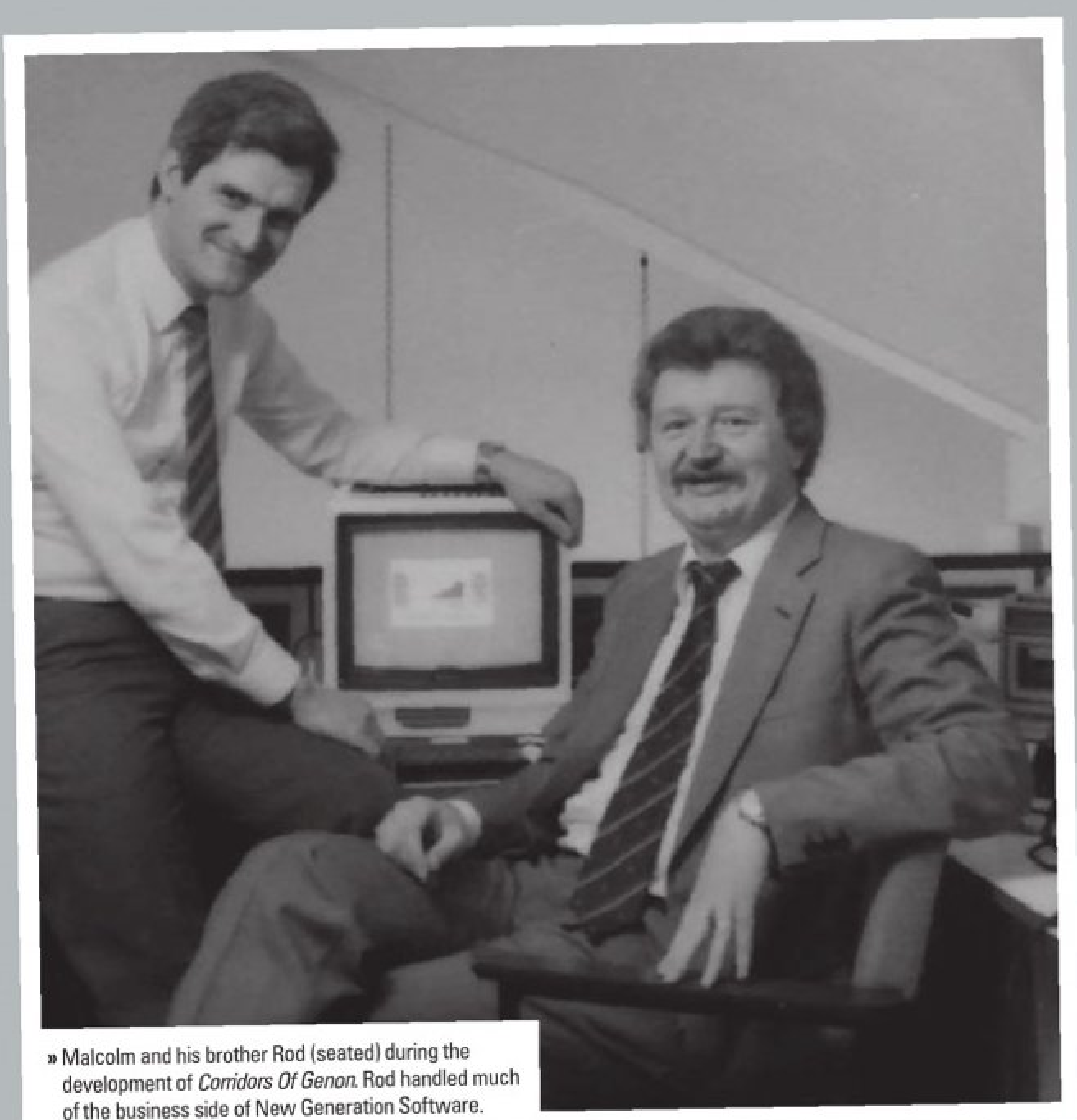


IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** JK GREYE
- » **DEVELOPER:** MALCOLM EVANS
- » **RELEASED:** 1982
- » **PLATFORM:** ZX81
- » **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

> I was coding late into the night and suddenly the monster leapt out at me. I jumped out of my skin!

Malcolm knew he'd found the fear factor



» Malcolm and his brother Rod (seated) during the development of *Corridors Of Genon*. Rod handled much of the business side of New Generation Software.

was just looking at the programming aspect of how I could display the maze on screen. If I'd seen other games of the time, maybe I wouldn't have tried it! It was an experiment that seemed to be working."

At this stage, the maze was empty, though Malcolm was mulling over what might stalk those corridors. By chance, he fell into conversation with an acquaintance at his classical guitar group, John Greye, who had also been tinkering with games creation on the ZX81. "When I told John I had a 3D maze up and running, he said, 'Wow, why don't you stick a monster in it?'" notes Malcolm, also adding that John had nothing more to do with the creation of *3D Monster Maze* until it was complete.

So Malcolm slung his guitar over his shoulder and headed home to add a roar to his raw outline. He began by drawing his monster on graph paper, immediately deciding on a Tyrannosaurus rex as the player's nemesis, and though the dinosaur looked rather indistinct when viewed from afar, when the beast was bearing down on you with gaping jaws, the effect was suitably arresting. And all this was done with inventive use of the ZX81's existing character set.

Indeed, the biggest challenge did not come from constructing the prehistoric beast from primitive ASCII characters but rather learning the assembly language code required to get everything moving smoothly. "I was learning assembly as I went along and that was the challenge," he sighs. "Debugging without using a debugger – now that was hard! I'd code it up on paper, check through it and then display various variables on screen and try to spot any faults! It did become something of an obsession. My wife would be saying, 'You don't mind if I go to sleep now, do you?'"

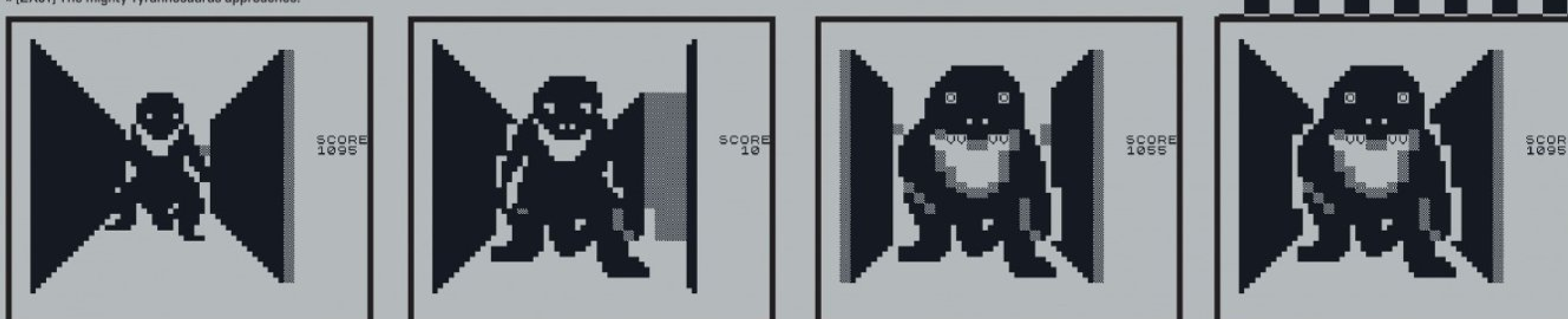


Over the next three months, Malcolm brought his beast to life. He ingeniously worked out that he could create the monster 'off-screen' and then swiftly change the screen display to look at that area of memory, meaning the giant T-rex could genuinely surprise the poor, lost adventurer. Worse still for the player, Malcolm had defied natural history and given his dinosaur a very modern brain. "Oh, Rex knows where you are," says Malcolm, with a hint of malicious glee. "He's coming after you all the time. I'd be making calculations to reduce the distance from him to you. There was a 2D map in there showing where you were and which way you were facing in relation to Rex. An algorithm made sure he knew where you were. Oh yes, he was hunting you down!"

The game left you in no doubt that you were prey. Messages displayed at the bottom of the screen warned that 'Rex lies in wait', then 'He is hunting for you' and, perhaps most disturbing, 'He has seen you'. Disturbing, because you hadn't seen Rex. He could be just around the next corner, or about to appear at the end of that long corridor, or already lurking behind you, ready to charge. You were vulnerable, powerless and very, very afraid. When the message appeared, 'RUN! He's behind you!' the panic could be palpable – desperate key presses on the Sinclair's notoriously unresponsive flat keyboard could cause the very real horror of the 16K RAM pack coming loose and the game crashing. Indeed, Malcolm had genuine concerns of another sort of flat-lining…

"Putting those messages in was

» [ZX81] The mighty Tyrannosaurus approaches.



MALCOLM'S FURTHER ADVENTURES IN THE THIRD DIMENSION

After the huge critical and commercial success of 3D Monster Maze, Malcolm continued to explore 3D game development. Here are four of his diverse experiments…

3D DEFENDER (ZX81, 1982)

While *3D Monster Maze* was going into production, Malcolm began his next 16K project – and this time he wanted to give it some firepower. "I'd never played the arcade machine," notes Malcolm, "but I'd seen Quicksilva's home version called *Defenda* at a computer show and thought I ought to have something to shoot in my next game! Doing something different with each game was important to me. I wanted to push my programming abilities. Now I'd got the hang of moving forward in 3D, I wanted to see how fast I could get it!"

The original idea was to have World War I biplanes in dogfights, but this was scuppered, as until the aircraft were in colliding distance, the ZX81's resolution rendered them as indistinguishable blobs. As with *3D Monster Maze*, Malcolm adopted large enemies he could prepare off-screen and then switch into view by pointing the machine's memory to the location. Suddenly, hefty alien craft were swooping towards you at alarming speed.

"I got the ground moving beneath you and as long as the enemies were moving fast enough, you couldn't really see the coarseness of the image!" he laughs. "To eliminate screen flicker, I was doing something termed 'time-slicing', which means you'd do half of something in one frame and the other half in the next. It gave the impression a lot was going on, very smoothly." It allowed plenty to be displayed – your control panel at the bottom, screen-filling explosions, and even a radar that indicated your next threat. However, Malcolm was less satisfied with his ZX81 swansong. "It ended up a very simple shoot-'em-up. There's nothing for you to protect except your planet. It was limited… but then back then, most games were!"



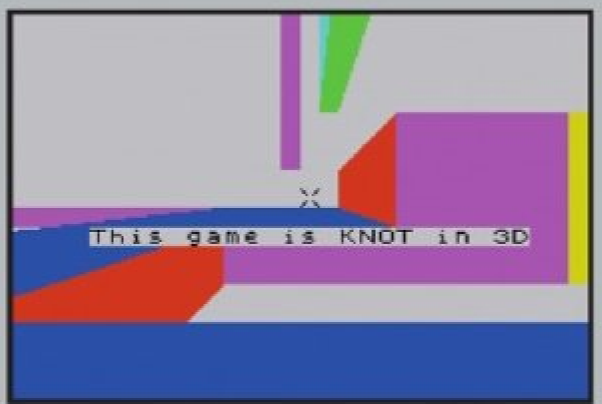
» [ZX81] The alien craft flew at impressive speed, the ground moving beneath you adding to the sense.



KNOT IN 3D (SPECTRUM, 1983)

The light cycles from *Tron* made abstract and placed in a cube that wrapped around on itself… Were any mind-altering substances used in the creation of Malcolm's most ambitious Spectrum title? "God, no," he assures us. "Though it was quite psychedelic. A neighbour had a BBC Micro and was showing me *Snake*. I wondered what it might look like in 3D, and that's where the idea came from."

The premise of the game, like its inspiration, is to keep moving and growing in length, without crashing into your own trail or those left by up to four rival computer-controlled 'traces'. "I had three colours associated with each trace to give it that 3D aspect," explains Malcolm. "I did everything using the colour map – there's no real graphics in there. You could see these other traces being formed in front of you at times. You were in a large cubed area and the map wrapped round – it gave the impression of infinity but actually it wrapped round in all directions, so you could move up and down, not just left and right, and if you travelled far enough, you'd return and see your own trail still there."



» [Spectrum] *Knot In 3D* is an intriguing experiment, and a strangely calming one. It's as fun to watch as to play.

Playing the game can be as confusing as trying to describe it, but once you get your head around the concept, it becomes at first surreal as you see the white space slowly fill with colourful trails, twisting and turning into Escher-like structures. Then, as the cube begins to fill, it becomes a stressful battle to find a way through these 3D walls and into the freedom of virgin space.

"At the beginning, it can be confusing, as you're not sure what you're doing," he acknowledges, "but as you start to visualise these weird shapes as trails, it can get really tense. I often finished a game in a sweat!"

3D TUNNEL (SPECTRUM, 1983)

After the disappointment of *Escape*, Malcolm adopted a new approach to creating 3D on the Spectrum. *3D Tunnel* used garishly coloured expanding squares, which gave a quite convincing impression that the player was careering along a twisting tunnel, to the point where you would often finding yourself 'leaning' into a corner as you desperately tried to make a swift turn without crashing into the tunnel wall. It almost gives you motion sickness.

"It definitely feels 3D, doesn't it?" chuckles Malcolm. "Perhaps even a little hypnotic, staring into the screen? It was my attempt to make a 3D game even faster. *3D Monster Maze* was slow, *3D Defender* was faster and this one was faster still!"

The game was well-received by the computer press of the day, with *Personal Computer Weekly* naming it as one of its 'Best of '83', particularly admiring the lovely animation of the swooping bat, dangling spider and weird hopping frog you had to blast on your subterranean journey.

"I think there was a style to my graphics," Malcolm muses. "A quick sketch and then I'd put them all on squared paper and adjust it from there. I could 'read out' an image in bytes and my wife would tap in the numbers." The highlight of *3D Tunnel* comes in its memorable finale, when the cliché that 'there's light at the end of the tunnel, except it's a train coming' is made gloriously real on the 48K version of the game, as an underground train hurtles towards you. "I'm just quirky like that," he winks. "There was a lot of detail in that; the way the train rushes past you and you have to dodge it by moving close to the edge of the tunnel without hitting it. There's a sliver, a tiny window, where you can pass it. And you can even see passengers in the train as it flies by…"

» [Spectrum] Malcolm used some marvellously garish colours to create the illusion.



CORRIDORS OF GENON (SPECTRUM, 1983)

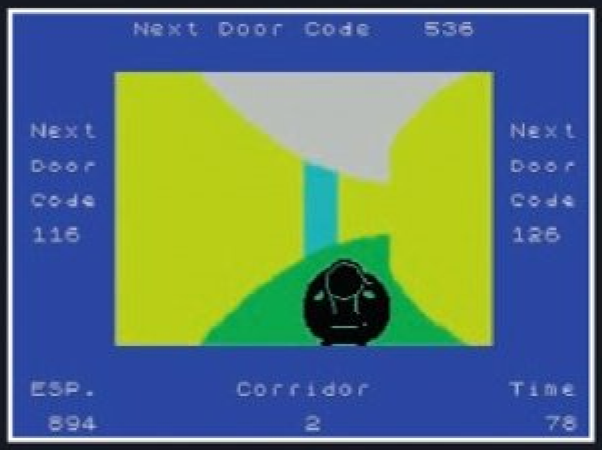
The name comes from a corruption of 'New GENeratiON', the company Malcolm founded after his split from JK Greye, and the impetus was once again on trying to create a 3D maze game on the Spectrum. However, the old limitations were still there.

"I wanted to do *3D Monster Maze* on the Speccy, but I still realised I couldn't get a character big enough," bemoans Malcolm. "I worked out the biggest I could do and tried to make a game from there." The result was the 'Bogul', who resembled a grumpy, snot-spewing Q*Bert, and would pursue you relentlessly, yet, by Malcolm's own admission, "he simply wasn't big nor scary enough."

However, this disappointment was ameliorated by the highly original premise of constructing the maze as a set of concentric circles, with curved corridors and sets of doors that had to be opened by swift code-breaking, roughly akin to the board game *Mastermind*.

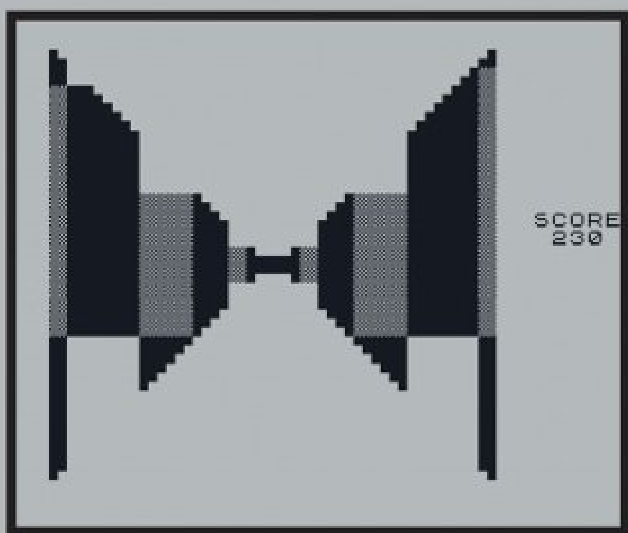
"You can hear the Bogul's footsteps and can tell if he's in the next corridor. If the footsteps stop, you know he's just behind the door. He's tracking you down! You'd be trying to crack a code and you heard the footsteps coming closer, so you'd panic and run away!" With much courage and brain-work, the player could eventually make it to the malevolent computer brain at the centre of the maze.

After facing another mind-boggling code-breaking exercise – and the longer you took to solve it, the more Boguls would clone and start to wander the maze – you still had to escape from these circles of hell, avoiding the legions of long-nosed enemies. *Corridors Of Genon* is definitely worth revisiting – the curvaceous setting and ominous footsteps give it a unique feel for a Spectrum title – but be advised that the original game came with an overlay that slipped over the bottom left of the Spectrum's keyboard and created a makeshift numerical pad for the code-breaking element of the game, which makes playing without it or on an emulator an uphill struggle.

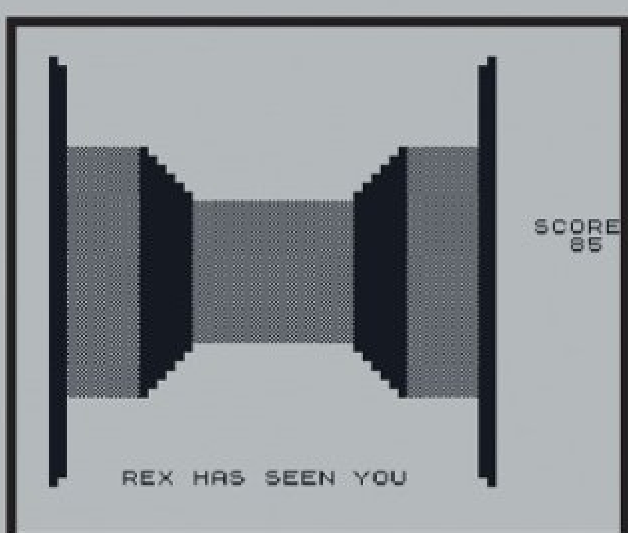


» [Spectrum] It's going to Bogulize you, baby!

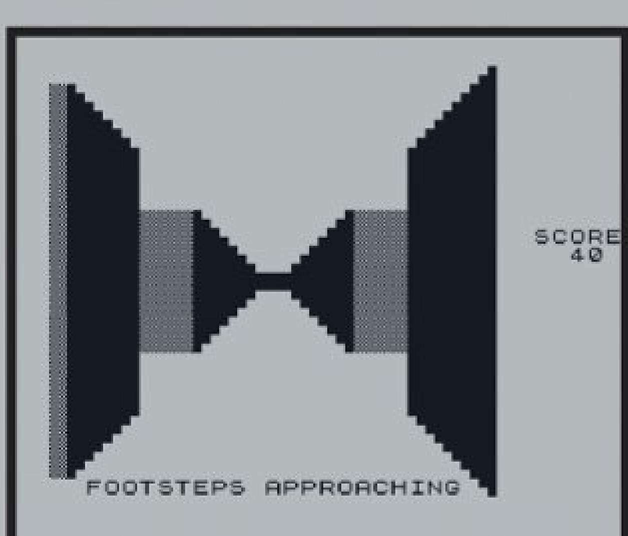
THE MAKING OF



» [ZX81] Creating the 3D corridors for the game was an impressive feat on the humble ZX81.



» [ZX81] Clever use of grey – 'dithering' for you techies out there – helped create the 3D perspective.



more about self-preservation on my part," he says. "I told you I'd nearly jumped out of my skin when I wasn't expecting Rex to appear, so those hints were to tell you something was happening. I also put the sound of his footsteps in – just clicks – to warn you. I thought some poor old fellow might be playing my game and it could give him a heart attack! I thought I'd put that you 'enter at your own risk', and that made me think of a fairground ride, so I made up this story that the whole thing was a fairground attraction, with a ringmaster inviting you in…"

Thus the bizarre introduction to the game was born, starring a showman daring the player to enter his mysterious maze and test their nerve against his monster, "perfectly preserved in silicon". He warned that this was not for those with a nervous disposition and that "the management accept no responsibility for the health and safety of the adventurer who enters his realm". These days, ambulance chasers would be rubbing their grubby, no-win-no-fee hands together over such statements, but back in the early Eighties, it created a wonderfully foreboding atmosphere. The long message that accompanied the opening was something of a technical achievement, too, requiring Malcolm to scroll only half of the screen while the stern carnival king delivered his cautionary tale.

In a further odd twist, when you inevitably end up as lunch, you are asked if you wish to appeal against being sentenced to roam the maze forever. "There's only a 50-50 chance it will grant your appeal and actually let you leave the game," sniggers Malcolm. "I'm weird like that."

Thankfully, most wanted to stay within the atmospheric maze and try to outwit Rex and reach that elusive exit. With the game complete, Malcolm took his handmade cassettes, taped in his bedroom individually with just a photocopy of the title on the cover, to a computer fair in London. Business among rapt ZX81 gamers was brisk but, most crucially, a buyer from WHSmith approached the JK Greye stand. "I negotiated a rather nice deal," smiles Malcolm. "The support we got from them was tremendous. We would've needed an enormous loan to produce the stock, but they guaranteed payment and we didn't need to put any money up front."

> I put the messages and the footsteps in to warn you. I thought some poor fellow might have a heart attack!
>
> **Health and safety, Eighties-style**

It came at a fortuitous time for Malcolm, as just as the deal was being finalised, he was made redundant from his main job, and thus almost by default became a software developer full-time. The arrangement with WHSmith was mutually beneficial, as *3D Monster Maze* went on to sell an estimated 90,000 copies, and that's before we speculate on how many naughty schoolboys played a pirated version.

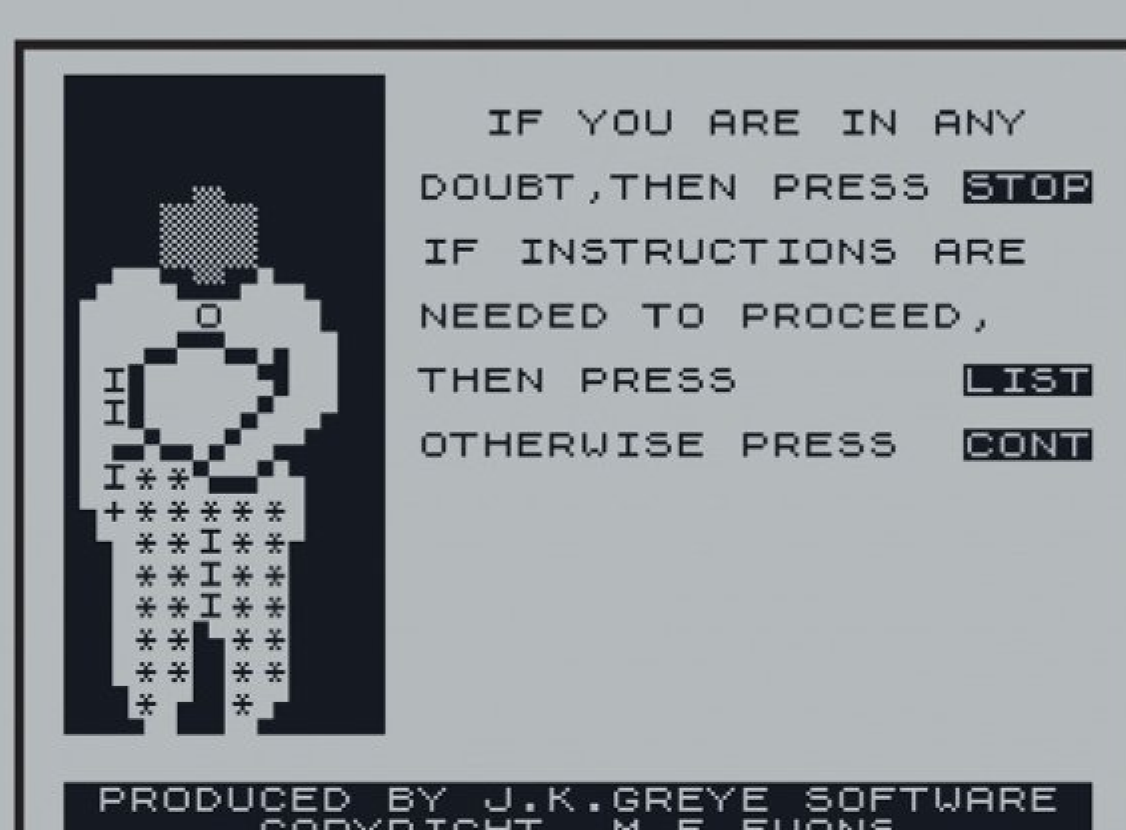
The critical reception from players and the press was universally positive and so, we assume, the computer magazines of the day must have been banging at Malcolm's door, eager to speak to the man that had made such a technical marvel.

"That's interesting," he muses. "Reviews of the game were very good but we never had anyone contacting us for interviews. It was only after splitting up from John Greye that I found out why. He wasn't pulling his weight. My wife and I were working for the business in the morning and he was supposed to be taking over in the afternoon and evening. I later discovered many magazines had tried to ring us in the afternoons, when calls were cheaper, and no one ever answered the phones! John was never there! It was a real missed opportunity…"

It was one of a number of factors that led to an acrimonious falling out with his erstwhile business partner and resulted in Malcolm heading out on his own as New Generation Software, the company name taken from a tagline penned by Malcolm for one of JK Greye's magazine adverts.

Though Malcolm released *3D Monster Maze* under his new banner, he knew the ZX81 was entering its dotage, so moved across to Sinclair's new machine, the Spectrum, and began work on *Escape*. It was to feature dinosaurs, a maze and an intrepid adventurer, and with the greater power of Sir Clive's latest wonder, surely this was going to be a sequel to *3D Monster Maze* with even more bite. Sadly, it didn't quite work out that way, as Malcolm explains.

"I got one of the first Spectrums in the country but soon found I couldn't do such large images or switch the screen quickly, like I'd been able to



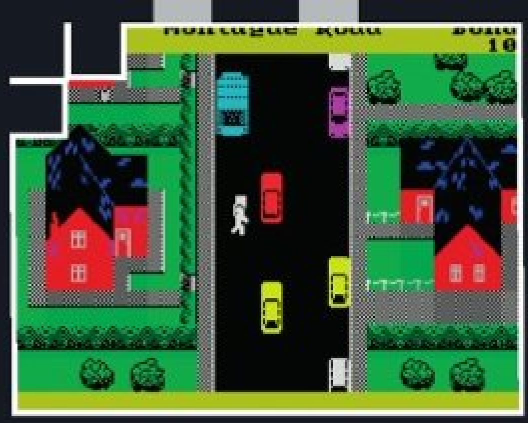
» [ZX81] The ringmaster gives a bow before "the mists of time pass over you" and you're transported to the maze…

BRICKING IT

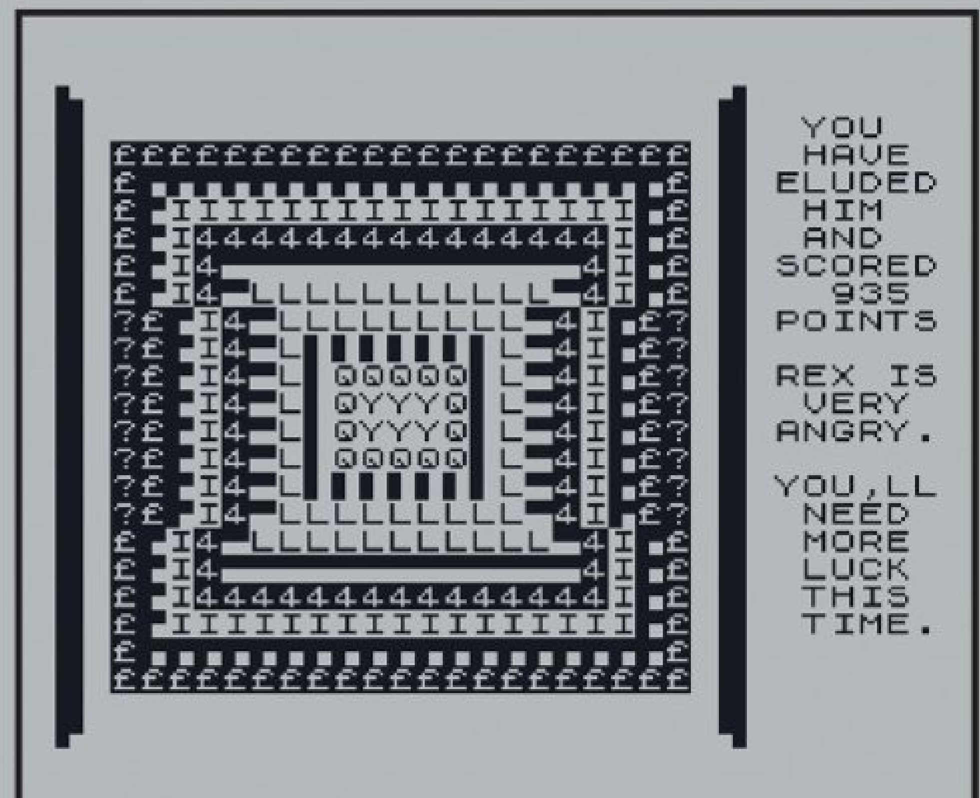
AS PART OF the deal with WHSmith that led to the commercial release of *3D Monster Maze*, Malcolm got into a fruitful conversation with the buyer about the power, or lack thereof, of the unexpanded ZX81.

"He said you can't do much on a 1K ZX81 because of the screen," recalls Malcolm. "I said I'd got a full-screen *Breakout* game in 1K. He couldn't believe it! Actually, I was 50 bytes over the top at that point, so I went back that weekend, got rid of the 50 bytes and sent it to him. He thought it was great, but said he didn't feel it was enough of a game to sell it at full price. So I said, 'Let's sell it at £2.' He said, 'Yeah, that's pocket money prices!' The game was so short that the duplicators had difficulty getting it onto the tape – that's why there are six copies on each cassette!" The game sold 22,000 copies and, almost in passing, Malcolm invented budget software.









» [ZX81] At last, the way out!

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

TRASHMAN (PICTURED)
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

THE COMPLETE MACHINE CODE TUTOR
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1984

JONAH BARRINGTON'S SQUASH
SYSTEM: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

with the ZX81, because of the time it took to write to the screen. It would be so slow and flickering. I was limited to smaller characters, so I tried to put more in and still keep it looking 3D. Then I stuck in the pterodactyl, which flew over the lot and disobeyed all the rules. That really messed things up."

It might not have been the *3D Monster Maze* update he was originally aiming for, but the game did well at retail and Malcolm continued his explorations in the third dimension. New Generation Software became synonymous with 3D titles, from the curvy *Corridors Of Genon* to the surreal *Knot In 3D*, though, ironically, it was the *Trashman* series, which adopted a more traditional viewpoint, that proved the company's biggest commercial success. "Actually, that did have some perspective in," notes Malcolm. "'When Trashman comes out of the pub, you can go behind a wall to be sick and you're okay again."

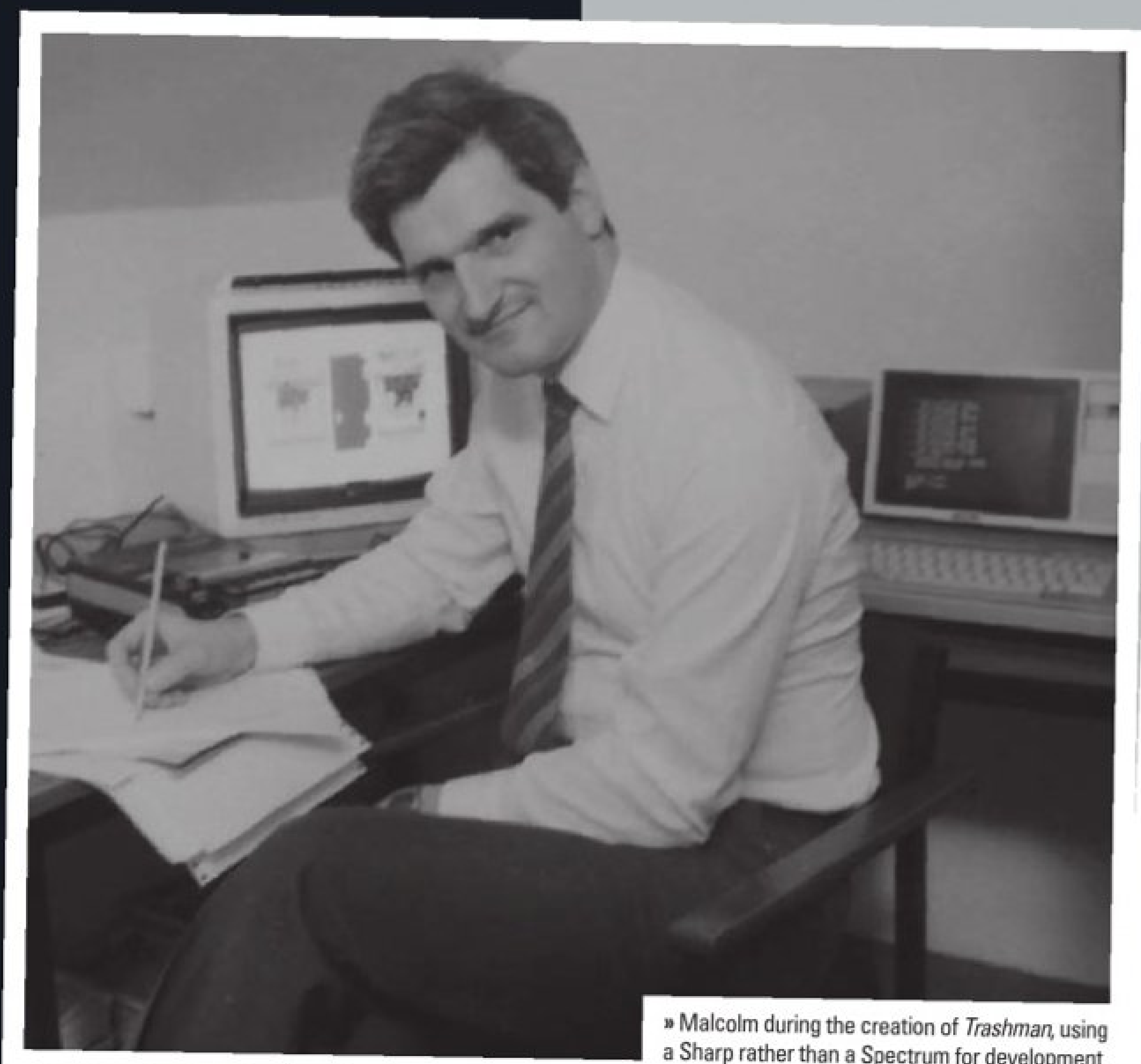
Players were probably grateful to be spared such an image in full 3D, but the British software industry was certainly feeling a little queasy itself. New Generation Software held out until 1986, when, due to financial pressures, it was forced to sell out its entire back catalogue to Virgin Software. "When we sold the rights to all my games to Virgin, part of the agreement was that we had to destroy all copies in stock," says Malcolm. "So we witnessed about four to five hundred cassettes going up in smoke at the council incinerator. Fortunately, about three weeks before that, to our surprise and delight we received an order for a box of 100 *3D Monster Maze* cassettes, so very few of that game were incinerated. This was about three or four years after the game came out!"

So Rex was saved from the flames and his legend lives on as a truly seminal title of the early British home computer scene. But for which gaming genre can he truly claim to have laid the foundations? There were 3D games such as Jim Bowery's *Spasim* up and running in the mid-Seventies, albeit on huge mainframes, and although the corridors and hungry, relentless beast of *3D Monster Maze* might put one in mind of a primitive *Doom*, the game of course lacks a chainsaw, BFG or any combat at all. Perhaps the clue is in how playing the game makes you feel: scared. You're the little guy, trying desperately to survive a largely unseen horror. We asked Malcolm whether he was aware of the *Resident Evil* games at all and the whole survival horror branch of modern gaming.

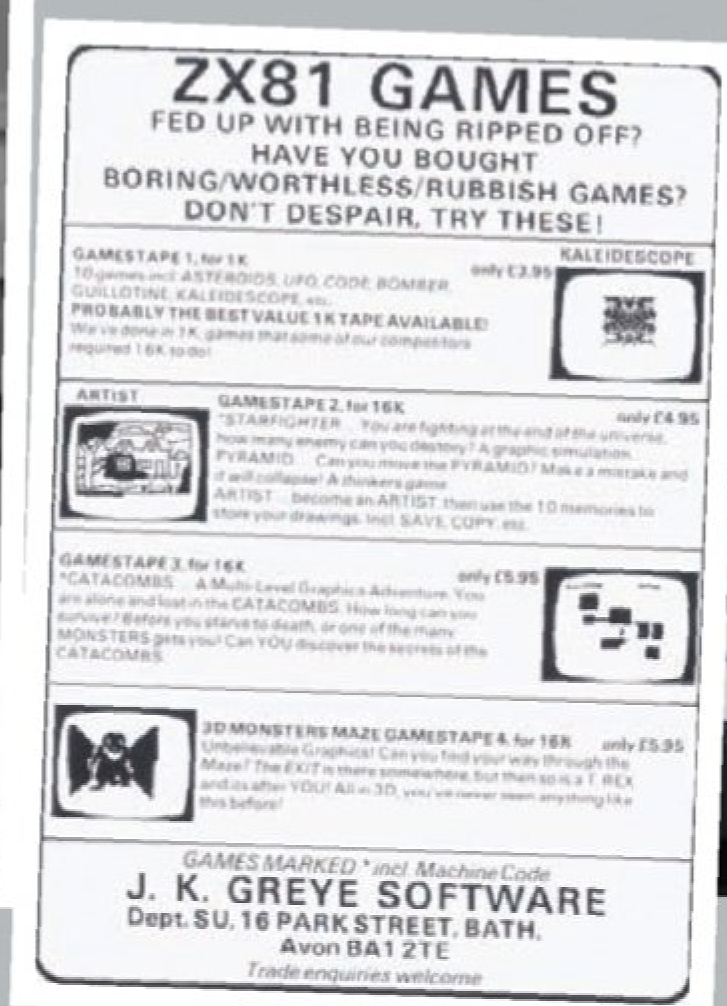
"I've heard of it, but I didn't play a lot of games then or afterwards. Do I think I started all that?" He takes a long pause. "In a way, perhaps. They do it differently now; they have so much more power. I'm just amazed my games are remembered at all!"

When Rex has stalked the corridors of our minds for 30 years, Malcolm, what did you expect?

Special thanks to Jake Warren and Martyn Carroll for helping us through the maze.



» Malcolm during the creation of *Trashman*, using a Sharp rather than a Spectrum for development.


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THE MAKING OF

MAZE CRAZE

3D Monster Maze might not have been the first maze game ever created, but it's certainly an important one. Here's a selection of other games that either escaped their mazes to step out, blinking, into the sunlight, or got trapped in a dead end, never to be heard of again

MOUSE IN THE MAZE

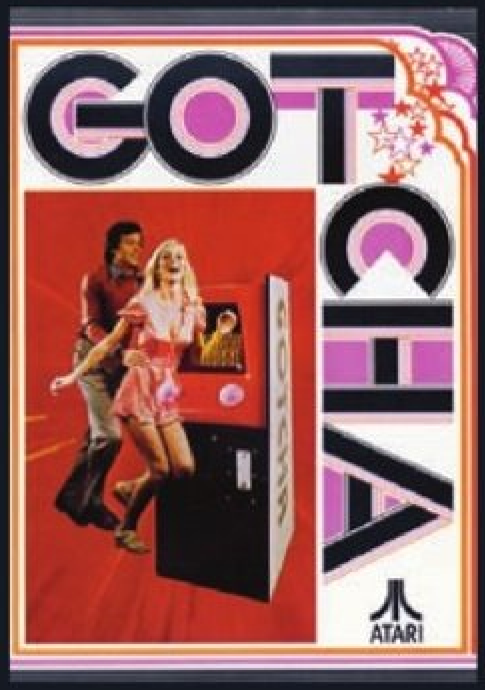
YEAR RELEASED: 1959

This game is so old it's been impossible for us to get a screenshot of it. It's nonetheless interesting, and the first maze game to boot. Created for the TX-0, players used a lightpen to place cheese (represented by dots) and maze walls on the screen. A mouse would then be released and would seek out the placed objects.

GOTCHA

YEAR RELEASED: 1973

In addition to being one of the earliest examples of the genre, it's also a controversial one. Atari's fourth videogame featured moulded breast-like controls and required two players to chase each other through a maze. Amazingly insensitive, its awful marketing flyer sums up its immaturity perfectly.



MAZE WAR

YEAR RELEASED: 1974

Predating *3D Monster Maze* by an impressive seven years, *Maze War* set a number of firsts and is arguably one of the first true examples of the first-person shooter. Utilising both a first-person and top-down view, and representing players as disembodied eyeballs, later versions included network play, online chat and an observer mode.

HEIANKYO ALIEN

YEAR RELEASED: 1979

Interesting maze game where the city of Heian-kyo (now Kyoto) is attacked by invading aliens. The player must run around the maze-like streets by digging holes for the aliens to fall into. Covering the hole kills the alien but takes time, meaning you can be nabbed by nearby enemies. *Space Panic* changed the perspective a year later.



BERZERK

YEAR RELEASED: 1980

In addition to being one of the first videogames to feature speech synthesis, *Berzerk* is also one of the first to put you in a deadly maze. The player is dumped in a simple maze that's filled with robots, including the smiling Evil Otto, and must fight his way out. It went on to inspire Eugene Jarvis' *Robotron: 2084*.



PAC-MAN

YEAR RELEASED: 1980

Although not the first maze chase game, *Pac-Man* is easily the most important, spawning a legacy that's lasted over 30 years. Pac-Man runs around a single-screen maze, munching pellets and avoiding the pursuing ghosts. Downing a power pill turns the tables on them, if only for a limited time…



AMIDAR

YEAR RELEASED: 1981

Amidar was an interesting take on the *Pac-Man* concept. While your gorilla still had to avoid enemies – in this case jungle tribesmen – he also had to paint the maze by fully moving around each on-screen block. It's a genius concept that was later copied by many unofficial clones.



GAUNTLET

YEAR RELEASED: 1986

Highly enjoyable co-operative game from Ed Logg that lets you and three other friends navigate huge multiscreen mazes that were teeming with vicious monsters. Notable for its bountiful amounts of speech, generators that would constantly spawn new monsters, and its fun co-op play, it was a smash hit in arcades. Even if it was heavily inspired by the excellent *Dandy*.



SNAIL MAZE

YEAR RELEASED: 1986

Snail Maze doesn't actually do anything that hasn't been seen in many other games. It's interesting, though, as Sega decided to hide it away inside the original Sega Master System. Press up and both 1 and 2 buttons simultaneously and you'd be taken to a complex maze that required you to reach the exit in as quick a time as possible. Great music as well.



DUNGEON MASTER

YEAR RELEASED: 1987

Inspired by the *Ultima* games, *Dungeon Master* is notable for being the first RPG to use real-time 3D. It's an excellent dungeon crawl, capturing the creepiness of *3D Monster Maze*, but including a wide variety of monsters and real-time combat. It would later influence everything from *Bloodwych* to *Captive* and Westwood Studios' *Eye Of The Beholder*.



MIDI MAZE

YEAR RELEASED: 1987

MIDI Maze was inspired by *Maze War* and allowed up to 16 players to compete against each other in huge virtual mazes, although players could also play against bots. Players were represented by large faces and would fire bullets at each other, and additional mazes could be created using an editor. It would gain further popularity outside its host machine in the form of *Faceball 2000* for the Game Boy and SNES.



BOMBERMAN II

YEAR RELEASED: 1991

Competitive maze games weren't exactly new, dating back as far as 1973's *Gotcha*. *Bomberman II* was easily one of the best examples, however, and pitted you against up to two other players in a battle to the death. Greatly refined since its original 1991 release, *Bomberman*'s multiplayer mode has gone on to become more important than its single-player game.



WOLFENSTEIN 3D

YEAR RELEASED: 1992

It may feature Nazis, bloodthirsty visuals and lots and lots of weaponry, but *Wolfenstein 3D* at its heart remains a maze game. There's no map, so there's a constant sensation of being lost within its identical-looking labyrinth walls. The sense of satisfaction you get from finally reaching an exit is just as exhilarating as taking down an actual enemy.



FLAMIN' FINGER

YEAR RELEASED: 2002

While not strictly a videogame, it's nevertheless an interesting concept, so we wanted to include it. Namco's *Flamin' Finger* is a prize-dispensing machine that presents the player with an LED maze. Players must then trace their finger across the screen to escape as quickly as possible within the time limit. It features 500 different mazes and competitive play for four players.



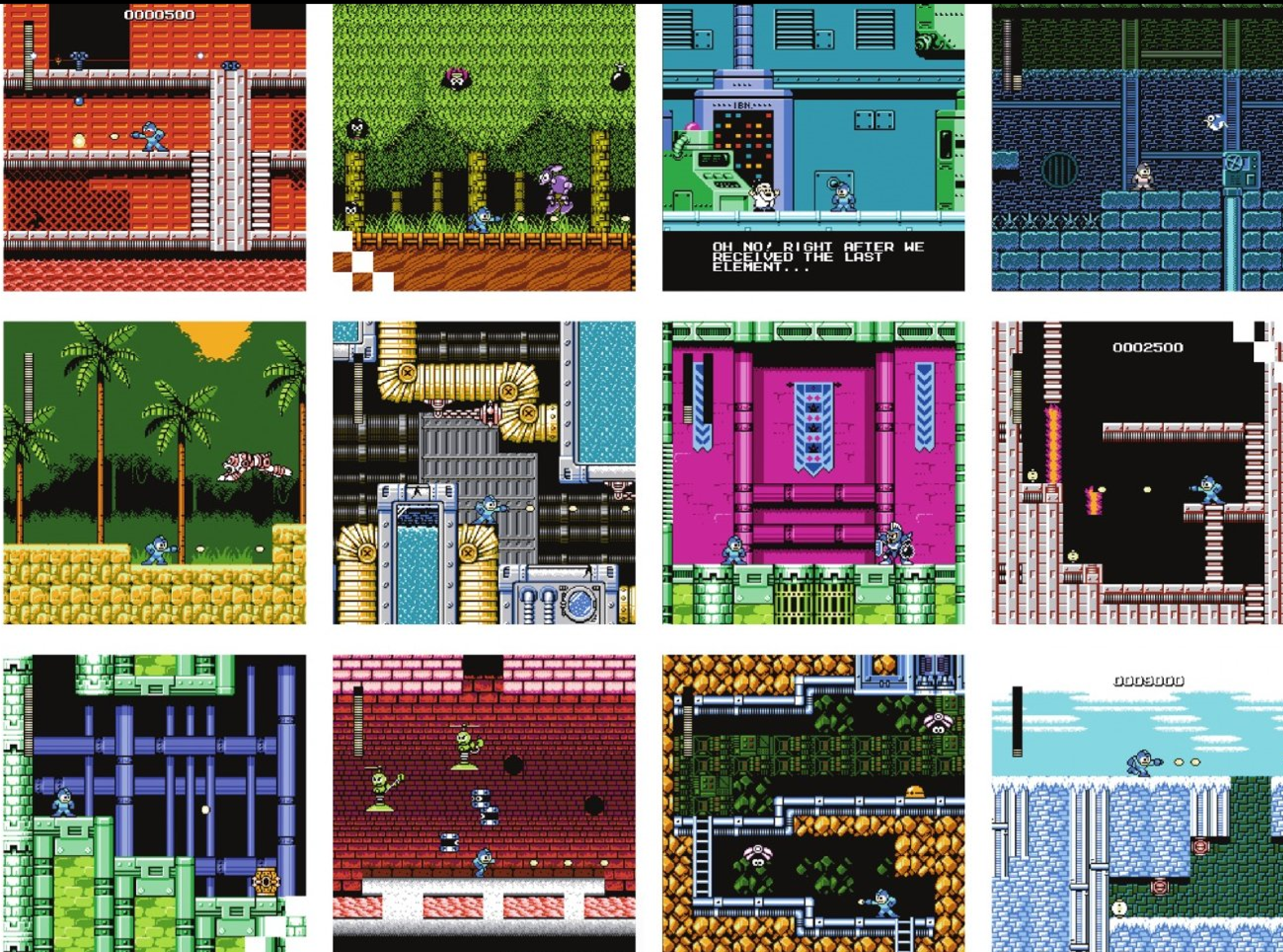
THE LAST GUY

YEAR RELEASED: 2008

This is one of the most recent examples of the maze game and a damn fine one to boot. This digital release is exclusive to Sony's PSN service and has you running around cities, collecting survivors and keeping them out of the jaws of rampaging monsters.




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Signature SERIES

MEGA MAN



Once upon a time, he was a poster child for the NES and climbed to the lofty status of mascot. Now, Mega Man is a footnote, only loved by a hardcore fan base. Darran Jones returns to the original adventures and relives happy memories

THE BACKGROUND

The *Mega Man* series is an interesting one. It has spawned over 100 games and spin-offs, had its title characters elevated to mascot status at Capcom, and has sold over 29 million units worldwide. And yet today, Mega Man is a forgotten hero, with new games getting cancelled, and some not even making it to UK shores. When he does appear in a game, it's usually in the form of a cameo or playable character, or in a digital release, like the enjoyable *Mega Man 9* and *10* for Virtual Console. Once upon a time, though, it was a completely different story, and it's that period we'll now be focusing on.

Known as *Rockman* in Japan, the first *Mega Man* game was released on the Nintendo Famicom in 1987. Interestingly, while he is often credited as the creator of the iconic blue hero, Keiji Inafune was actually a co-creator, which he revealed at the Tokyo Game Show in 2007. Documented by GameSpot, he said: "I'm often called the father of Mega Man, but actually, his design was already created when I joined Capcom. My mentor, who was the designer of the original Mega Man, had a basic concept, so I only did half the job in creating him." It's an honest admission, but hardly surprising from Inafune, who, before leaving Capcom in 2010, wasn't afraid to say how he felt about the company and the Japanese games industry in general.



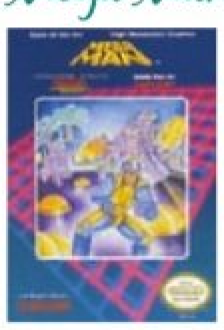
Back in 1987, though, Inafune was a 22-year-old aspiring illustrator, who jumped at the chance to have more control on a project, having started as a graphic designer on the original *Street Fighter*. *Rockman*'s earliest name stems from the team's love of rock music and a rock-paper-scissors approach

to the boss battles, which still holds true in later games. Limited by the Famicom's colour palette, and inspired by numerous mangas, *Rockman* had a cute, cartoony look and structure that led many to think that the character was Capcom's answer to Nintendo's Mario, who had already cemented his success on the Famicom thanks to *Super Mario Bros*.

This was far from the case, as beneath *Rockman*'s sugary sweet exterior was a difficulty that many gamers struggled with. The series would go on to gain a reputation for being extremely unforgiving, a trait that remains with it to this day. And yet this difficulty didn't seem to matter to gamers, with Capcom releasing no fewer than six games for Nintendo's console over a six-year period.

THE GAMES

Mega Man (1987)



The original *Mega Man* marked a huge departure for Capcom, as it was the first time that it had focused on a home console release. It had previously worked exclusively on arcade titles and ports of its games, which may explain why *Mega Man*'s difficulty is so high. It's like Capcom forgot that it wasn't making a coin-op game and wanted you to shove in as many credits as you could, or that creating arcade games was so deeply ingrained that it never considered anything else.

Infamous for its high difficulty and abominable Western box art, *Mega Man* is actually an exceptionally well-designed game when you sit down and dissect it, which is something it often isn't given credit for. *Mega Man* allows you to tackle its first six stages in any order you like, a novel approach at the time and something that stayed with the series throughout all its NES sequels, and it's a credit to Inafune and the rest of his five-man team that they were able to create a game with such an open-ended approach.

Mega Man is also famous for its inventive boss fights, which require both a good eye and great co-ordination to beat, but reward you with the boss's weapon when you finally defeated him. Unlike Mega Man's arm cannon, these more powerful weapons were limited in uses, with Mega Man needing to top them up on a regular basis. Once all six bosses had been tackled, *Mega Man*'s final stage – a mash-up of four previous levels – and the six bosses had to be battled again, a staple that has featured in later *Mega Man* titles as well as other Capcom franchises.

Despite acclaim upon its release, *Mega Man* wasn't a particularly high seller, which, in today's market, would have been the death of the franchise. Capcom saw its potential, however, and gave Inafune and his team another crack…

Mega Man 2 (1988)



That came in the form of *Mega Man*'s excellent sequel, but it also came with a proviso from Capcom. While Inafune and his team were allowed to work on a sequel, they had to do it in tandem with other projects, meaning *Mega Man 2* had something of a stilted development, with the team often working in their own time. Even so, *Mega Man 2* was a resoundingly good game, effortlessly building on the DNA of the original game,

EXPERT OPINION



Retro Gamer reader Ian Barlow is a huge Mega Man fan, who has been collecting memorabilia for years. Here's his insight into Capcom's long-running franchise

RG: Why do you think *Mega Man* struck such a chord with gamers on its release?
Ian Barlow: The non-linearity was a real eye-opener for me – being able to choose what order to tackle the levels was extremely unusual for a game at the time. Stuck on one level or boss? Simply tackle a different level instead and come back to it later.

Add to that how Mega Man's ability to gain his foe's weapons after defeating them not only enabled you to access secret areas and alternate routes in levels but also helped make some of the game's more notorious boss fights easier to handle.

RG: Why are speed runs so popular for this series?
IB: For me, it's mainly down to working out the quickest order to tackle the bosses, working out how to shave a few extra seconds off your time by properly utilising the different weapons at your disposal.

RG: What important changes did the *Mega Man X* series bring to the franchise?
IB: The introduction of Zero as a second playable character in *Mega Man X3* was a big change for the series, as up until this point you only ever played as Mega Man. Capcom then expanded on this concept by giving Zero his own story and unique play style in *X4* onwards, and eventually also introduced Axl in *X7* and *X8*.

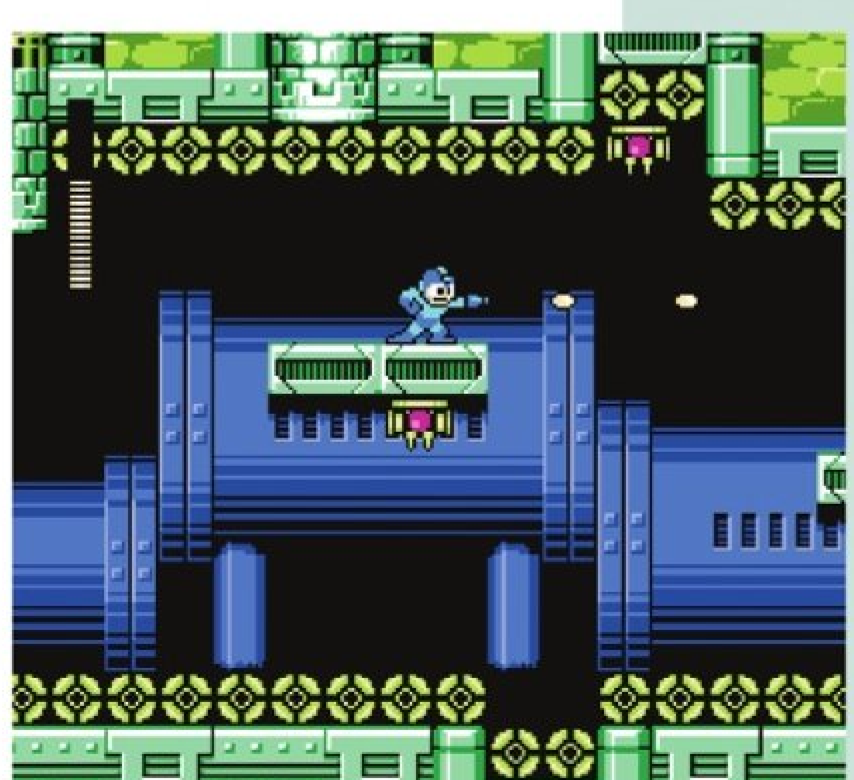
Then there are the various upgrades you could collect during each game. While there were the odd secret items here and there in the classic series, the *X* series made a bigger deal of item, weapon and armour upgrades for X. Each game included hidden upgrades that would improve X's various abilities, including a better charged shot, air-dashing, and even the ability to learn Ryu and Ken's Fireball and Dragon Punch moves from *Street Fighter*!

RG: *Mega Man* has a hardcore following. What is the community planning for his 25th anniversary?
IB: No doubt the community will be doing marathons and speed runs of the series to coincide with his 25th anniversary. As well as that, we can look forward to some nice soundtracks and remixes from the various games in the series to commemorate the occasion. Hopefully Capcom themselves will also be planning something nice to celebrate the anniversary!

RG: How many total games are there in the franchise?
IB: It's hard to say for certain! There are around 128 titles in the *Mega Man* series so far, but this isn't taking into account the many weird and wonderful titles released in Asia, such as the PC games *Rockman Strategy*, *Rockman X Math Tornado*, etc, or some of the excellent doujin games such as *Rockmen R* and *RosenKreuzStilette*.

RG: We hear you're something of a collector. Is this true?
IB: You could say that! I've been seriously collecting the series for several years now, as it has always remained my favourite game series ever. So far I've managed to collect over 350 different games, including regional and cover variants, from the series, but I am always discovering new variants on my travels, so I don't think I'll ever manage to actually 'complete' my collection!

RG: Why do you think the *Mega Man* series remains so loved by fans?
IB: It's a series that has aged really well and remains just as challenging and playable, even today. Plus with the recent releases of *Mega Man 9* and *10*, many people have been revisiting the previous entries in the series to see where it all began.



» [NES] The series' famed difficulty was a particular barrier until the game introduced passwords. Battery backup wasn't brought in until later hardware.



» [NES] Inafune was unhappy with *Mega Man 3* at the time of its release, having been forced to put it out before he felt it was finished.

Signature Series

> **"Mega Man 2 was a massive success for Capcom, selling over 1.5 million copies worldwide"**

Also appeared on…

MEGA MAN PROVED popular and has received a number of digital ports and remakes. An early example was its inclusion on *Mega Man: The Wily Wars*, a Mega Drive compilation of the first three games, which featured enhanced visuals and arranged music and the cool Wily Tower mode, which boasted new levels and bosses and the option to choose a loadout of weapons from the three games. *Mega Man* has also gone on to appear in *Rockman Complete Works* for the PlayStation, which featured a useful tip giving Navi mode; and *Mega Man Anniversary Collection*, a US only release for PS2, GameCube and Xbox.



Our favourite remake is *Mega Man Powered Up* for the PSP. Released in 2006, its New Style features two new bosses, Oil Man and Time Man, who were first planned for the original NES game.

even if the core structure was largely the same. For many, it remains the best early *Mega Man* game, and it's not hard to see why.

The structure of *Mega Man 2* largely follows *Mega Man*, but on a grander scale. There are now eight bosses to defeat, and the levels themselves are more closely linked to the bosses that reside there. Mega Man still gains weapons from defeated bosses, but he now has access to new items, such as handy floating platforms that allow him to reach otherwise inaccessible areas on previously completed stages, and the Energy Tank, which lets him refill his precious energy bar at any time.

For many gamers, though, the password system was by far the biggest improvement to the series, as it finally allowed more gamers to make decent headway. Codes appeared whenever a boss was defeated, allowing for completion in bite-sized chunks. The gameplay was also a little easier in general, and while Mega Man still couldn't crouch, many of the enemy patterns were far easier to predict, meaning there were fewer frustrating deaths than in the original.

Perhaps most importantly, though, *Mega Man 2* was a massive success for Capcom, selling over 1.5 million copies worldwide. Small fry when compared to *Super Mario Bros*' 40 million tally, but a huge deal for Capcom, and rightful vindication for a triumphant Inafune, who immediately set to work on a sequel that would appear less than a year later.

Mega Man 3 (1990)



Mega Man's third outing arrived nine months after *Mega Man 2* and continued to build upon the core gameplay mechanics that had served the series so well. By far the biggest addition to the series was Mega Man's new ability to slide dash, which both allowed access to new areas and also made avoiding some weapons easier. Equally important was the addition of Rush, a new robotic canine companion for our hero, who had a number of useful abilities that ranged from the handy Rush Coil, which let Mega Man jump higher, to the Rush Marine that allowed him to travel underwater. These new enhancements continued to ensure that Mega Man's third adventure remained fresh and exciting, even if the difficulty was as high as ever.

Mega Man 3 also introduced Protoman, a mini-boss who would continually turn up and battle Mega Man throughout his lengthy quest. Notable for his red garb and flowing scarf, Protoman became the first new character that Inafune himself designed from scratch, and he would regularly show up in later games in the series, eventually going on to appear as an unlockable character in *Mega Man Powered Up* for the PSP. Mega Man's sister, Roll, also appears. While she pops up in the first game, it's right at the end. This is where she gets named.

Another interesting aspect of *Mega Man 3* is that Capcom finally realised that it might be a good idea to ensure that the hero on the cover actually looked like the one in the game. As a result, the box art was a huge improvement over previous work, capturing the anime look that Inafune had always intended.

Mega Man 4 (1991)



Mega Man's fourth game marked a transition for many fans, who felt that his quests were becoming a little too predictable. While there's a certain truth to this, it's nonetheless a well-crafted game, which continued to introduce subtle improvements to the series. The most notable of these is Mega Man's ability to charge his Mega Buster, the arm cannon that he's used throughout his adventures. It adds greatly to the game, making many sections easier, but this caused some to state that the series was starting to become unbalanced. Protoman and Rush also returned, and Rush once again featured all his original skills. Interestingly, Inafune decided not to include the drill attack that had been first planned for Rush during his original creation in *Mega Man 3*. There were additional support items in the form of wire and balloon adaptors, but unlike other items, which were awarded after completing certain stages, they were instead hidden.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF MEGA MAN

MEGA MAN HAD six adventures on the NES, but that wasn't to be the end of the 'classic' *Mega Man* series, as it's now known. *Mega Man 7* appeared on the Super Nintendo and, while graphically superior, featured similar gameplay mechanics to the earlier NES games. Rush could now use a Rush Search, which allowed him to dig up objects, and only four enemy bosses were initially selectable. There was also a new shop – first featured in the Game Boy games – that could be used to buy items and power-ups. *Mega Man 7* was the only 16-bit outing for the core classic series, as *Mega Man 8* made its debut on PlayStation and Saturn in 1996. It largely followed the template of *Mega Man 7*, but Mega Man could now combine weapons, which added to *Mega Man 8*'s overall strategy. The core series would then lie dormant for a further 12 years, until Capcom released *Mega Man 9* in 2008 and *Mega Man 10* in 2010. Both titles were digital releases and eschewed modern day visuals in favour of the original look of the NES games.





SERIES HIGHLIGHTS





■ START YOUR FIRST game of *Mega Man* and you're greeted by this screen. As soon as you start cycling through the six bosses, you're bowled over by the sheer amount of choice available.



■ *MEGA MAN 2'S* opening remains iconic. You're given a brief intro before the screen pans skyward, finally resting on Mega Man, who stands heroically, his hair blowing in the breeze.



■ THE FIRST THING that strikes you about Hot Dog is his sheer size. It's an apt name as well, as it's not long before he belches out a searing sheet of flame at you. Ouch.



■ CERTAIN STAGES FEATURE light-carrying enemies. Shoot them and you'll plunge the screen into darkness, where it will stay until you find another light source. A very neat touch.



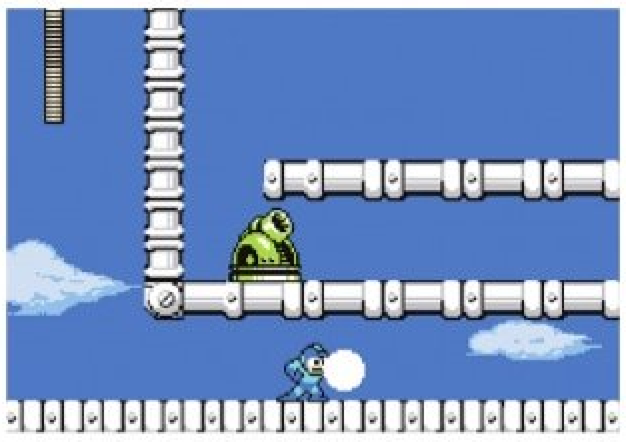
■ MEGA MAN'S FUSION with Rush in *MM6* is a nice touch. Simply select the power-up and Rush appears, transforms, and then bolts himself on to his beloved master. Awesome.



■ THERE ARE A huge number of bosses in the series, but the Yellow Devil is one of the most memorable. He's absolutely huge and has some fiendishly tricky attack patterns.



■ RUSH IS INTRODUCED in a touching scene during *Mega Man 3* and proves to be an extremely useful ally. He's as faithful as any normal dog, but doesn't need feeding.



■ AFTER FIGHTING WITH just a weedy arm cannon in three adventures, the Mega Buster is a massive improvement. Unfortunately, it led to an over-reliance on it in later games.

Mega Man 4 also marked the artistic debut of designer Hayato Kaji, who came up with the idea of Mega Man's chargeable Mega Buster and would go on to oversee many later *Mega Man* games. It marked the first time in the series that the bosses weren't actually created by the designers themselves. Instead, a competition went out to the gaming public, which resulted in over 70,000 submissions. The winners not only had their creations brought to life, but were given exclusive golden cartridges. Needless to say, those eight carts are now worth insane amounts of money to collectors.

Mega Man 5 (1992)



By *Mega Man*'s fifth instalment, it was beginning to become obvious that the franchise was running out of ideas. Inafune wasn't as involved in *Mega Man 5* as he was in past games, and it shows in its general lack of creativity. A new project lead was called in, and while Hayato Kaji also helped out, he's gone on record to say that it wasn't the easiest title to work on.

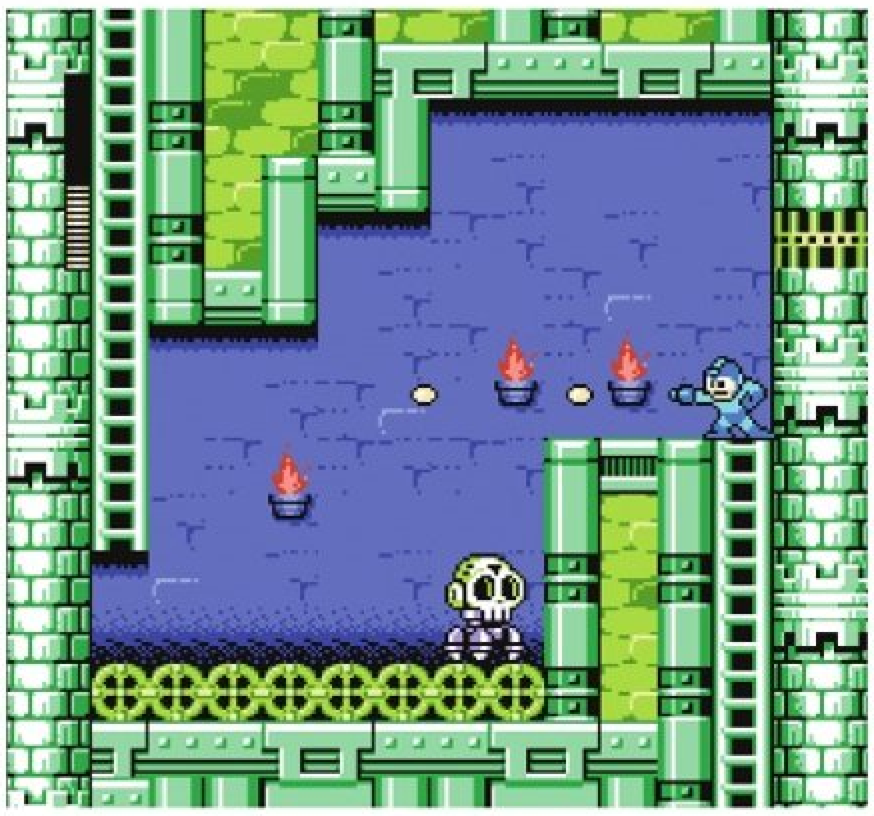
This is partly because *Mega Man 5* doesn't really feature any of the creativity found in earlier games. A new animal friend arrived in the form of Beat, a bird who would attack on-screen enemies, provided you found the circuit boards that were scattered throughout the eight worlds, while the Mega Buster had also been greatly powered up. Even the addition of new Mega Tanks, which fully recharged Mega Man's health, and stages with reversed gravity or vehicles couldn't hide the fact that the series was beginning to run out of steam…

Mega Man 6 (1993)



Considering that *Mega Man 6* was being worked on simultaneously with the first spin-off game, *Mega Man X*, it didn't turn out too badly at all. Inafune was once again heavily involved and was determined that Mega Man's final NES outing would see him going out with a bang. Mega Man could now fuse together with Rush via a pair of Rush Adaptors, and doing so granted him the ability to either punch through large blocks or fly and hover for a limited amount of time. Gameplay was kept balanced by ensuring that Mega Man wasn't too powerful in these new forms. For example, you can't use the charged shot in jet form, and it's impossible to use Mega Man's slide attack in either form. Bosses continued to be designed by fans, with submissions totalling over 200,000 – further proof of *Mega Man*'s enduring popularity – but Inafune was beginning to find the project challenging, with many designs having to be constantly altered to keep his superiors happy. There was also the issue of Knight Man and Wind Man being created very late in the game's development, due to there being a separate competition for American gamers, which put additional strain on Inafune and his team. All the hard work wasn't in vain, though, as *Mega Man 6* is a worthy ending to one of the NES's longest-running franchises, thanks to challenging level design, more weapons and some excellent power-ups. *Mega Man 6* may have been Mega Man's last NES adventure, but it certainly wasn't the end of the franchise. That, however, is a story we'll save for another time…

Special thanks to Ian Barlow for his help with this article.



» [NES] *Mega Man 6* was released extremely late in the NES's life, hitting three years after the launch of the Super Nintendo.

Minority Report



In a feature that looks to prove that retro gaming is a vast and still greatly unconquered frontier, Stuart Hunt takes a look at some notable games that have appeared on lesser-known systems as well as underappreciated classics that became lovelorn on household names



» [PC Engine] The knack to the big points is to capture people in the act of doing something silly.

GEKISHA BOY

■ SYSTEM: PC ENGINE ■ DEVELOPER: TOMCAT SYSTEM ■ YEAR: 1992

■ **Even after the release of such snap-happy videogames as *Pokémon Snap* and *Fatal Frame, Gekisha Boy* (also known as *Photograph Boy*) seems like an unusual idea on which to base a game, so goodness knows what reactions to it were like when it appeared on the PC Engine back in 1992. More peculiar than its paparazzo concept, however, is its surprisingly bleak premise, which contrasts harshly against the colourful visuals and goofy characters populating its eight levels.**

You play a young photography student called Dave, who decides to drop out of an esteemed LA photography school after his parents die in a plane crash. Feeling sorry for his student, the dean of the college offers Dave the chance to graduate quickly if he manages to take eight superb photos. Thankfully for Dave, the second he sets foot out of the college gates, the entire world starts acting really quite peculiar, making this mission a great deal simpler.

The first stage, for example, sees Dave stumble across the alien abduction of a car, a posse of characters resembling Mr Game & Watch helping a woman escape a burning building – an homage, of course, to the G&W game *Fire* – a Marilyn Monroe-alike standing over a drain cover and doing her best not to flash her knickers, a superhero flying through the clouds, the *Back To The Future* car burning a hole through the fabric of time, and, finally and most disturbingly, a plane falling from the sky after its engine fails. Surely the sight of the latter would be enough to send poor Dave over the



» CASTLE EXCELLENT

■ SYSTEM: MSX
■ DEVELOPER: ASCII CORPORATION ■ YEAR: 1986

■ ***Castle Excellent* is** the sequel to *The Castle*, a fun platform adventure that was released on the MSX. Each screen of the massive citadel is filled with enemies, hazards, keys and colour-coded doors, which can only be bypassed on your quest to find Princess Margarita with the correctly coloured key. Needless to say, said keys are often in the most devilish of places, meaning you need both wits and acrobatics to acquire them. While slower-paced than *The Castle* – certain screens require a painstaking alignment of items to proceed – *Castle Excellent* remains an enjoyable and challenging platformer.



» REVEAL

■ SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC
■ DEVELOPER: IAN HEATH ■ YEAR: 1988

■ **We love the** concept behind *Reveal*. At the beginning of a stage you're presented with a 3D landscape that you have seconds to memorise. It then disappears, and you must repaint it as quickly as possible using a handy gyroscope. Hit one of the enemies that patrol the landscape and you'll lose a precious life. You'll also forfeit a life if you fail to complete the hidden landscape within the strict time limit you're given. Things are further complicated by the fact that certain enemies will eat up your path, requiring you to revisit past areas. Although frustrating at times, it's also strangely compelling.



» STAKES WINNER 2

■ SYSTEM: NEO GEO
■ DEVELOPER: SAURUS ■ YEAR: 1996

■ **This sequel is** a huge improvement over the original and perfect proof that any idea can be turned into a good game. *Stakes Winner 2* is all about management. You have to find a fine balance between your horse's speed and its temperament; whip it too many times, for example, and it will understandably get angry and its performance will be affected. Power-ups can be found on the courses or picked up at the start of each race, while the addition of a fun two-player mode offers plenty of longevity. Yes, it's extremely simplistic, but it's also strangely addictive.

» [PC Engine] Perving means points.



» [PC Engine] A lot of the enjoyment comes from recognising all the references.





» ABOUT THE SYSTEM

- Released in Japan on 30 October 1987, the PC Engine featured an 8-bit CPU and dual 16-bit graphics processors, and was able to display up to 256 colours at once.
- The dimensions of the sleek and stylish white Japanese version of the console come in at a tiny 135x130x35mm. That's smaller than a cat.

edge? You'd think anyway.

Thankfully the gameplay, which works like a cross between a forced-scrolling platformer and the home versions of *Operation Wolf*, isn't as crazy as Dave's world. He earns points towards each level's target score by snapping anything he feels looks strange or interesting, and this involves you placing the viewfinder reticle over the object and pressing fire. Taking a shot of a businessmen walking down the street, for example, will net him 100 points, but taking a snap of that same businessman slipping on a banana skin will get you 300. The crazier the scene you capture, the more points you stand to earn.

As the levels scroll automatically, reactions and dexterity are your two greatest weapons. Foreseeing events before they happen and having your reticle poised for action is the trick. As such, progression can simply be earned through playing and replaying each stage until you know exactly how that day's events will unfold and acting accordingly, like Bill Murray in *Groundhog Day*.

As well as a target score to meet, further challenge comes in the form of dangers for Dave to surmount, such as skateboards or bouncing balls, which can be avoided with simple left or right movements, jumping over them or blasting them with your camera. Should Dave collide with any obstacle, he is docked precious film, which makes it more difficult for him to reach his target.

Gekisha Boy is a quirky game with nice cartoon visuals and engaging gameplay. It's also one of the PC Engine's more bizarre exclusives.



» [PC Engine] Dave waits to hear whether his pictures of people's pain and suffering are good enough.

» NES

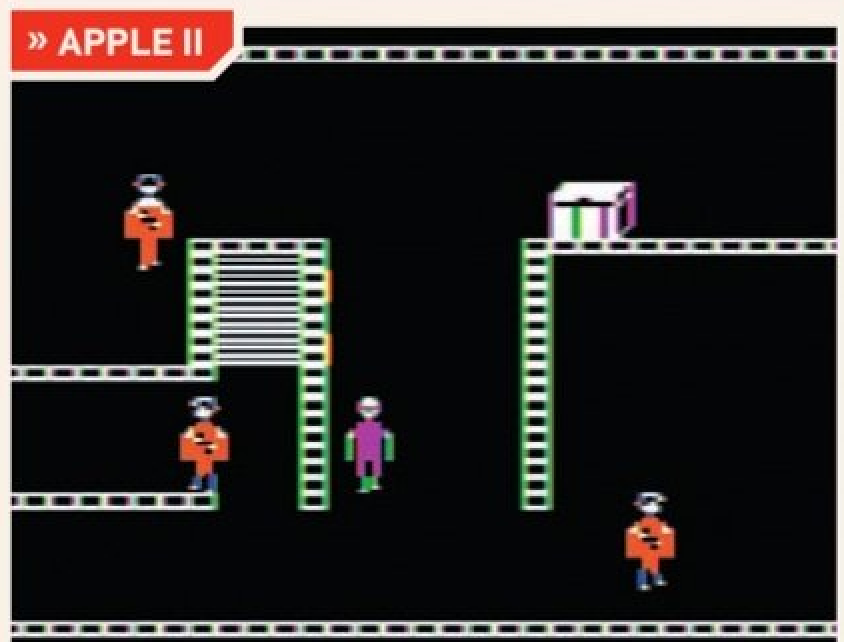


» POWER BLADE

■ SYSTEM: NES
■ DEVELOPER: NATSUME ■ YEAR: 1991

■ **Imagine a mishmash** of *Contra* and *Mega Man* and you've pretty much got *Power Blade*. You play a soldier and must rendezvous with agents to obtain a key card, granting entry to a room containing a security bot guarding a master computer. Destroying the robot with your boomerang weapon and accessing the computer in six different zones will gain you admission to the final stage, where everything ends on a positive note if you can beat the alien boss. With tough platform parts and respawning enemies, *Power Blade* is challenging and wholly imitative, but still enjoyable overall.

» APPLE II



» CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN

■ SYSTEM: APPLE II
■ DEVELOPER: MUSE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1981

■ **An Apple II** classic that was also ported to the C64, A800 and PC, Silas Warner's *Castle Wolfenstein* is a notable release for a number of reasons, among them that it is widely regarded as the earliest 'stealth' action game and was a big inspiration for the far more well-known *Wolfenstein 3D*. Sneaking about the rooms of the titular stronghold, your mission is to find the secret plans and escape the castle by fighting guards, creeping past them or dressing up in their clothes. The fantastically atmospheric *Castle Wolfenstein* proves that immersion and tension was perfectly achievable on limited home hardware.

» MSX



» WARRIOD

■ SYSTEM: MSX
■ DEVELOPER: UPL ■ YEAR: 1990

■ **Given its popularity** in Japan, the MSX's library is full of quirky games that you may not be aware existed. *Warriod* is essentially a futuristic take on Taito's early coin-op *Gun Fight* (aka *Western Gun*), and sees two laser-firing robots – either two players or one player against the CPU – partaking in an extremely protracted gun battle. With your bots nicely auto-aiming, albeit slowly, all you have to worry about is spamming the fire button to let off shots, and dodging enemy bullets to ensure that your opponent's health is depleted before yours. It's a simple concept that's more fun with a pal.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

RETRO GAMER DIGS UP THE FILES OF THE CLASSIC COMPANIES OF OLD

Platinum Productions

Few names describe a company's output accurately, yet in some cases a title just says it all. Kim Wild finds out from David Anderson how Platinum Productions really did live up to its illustrious billing

To get to the origins of Platinum Productions, we need to go further back in time, when David Anderson first discovered the joy of programming. "It was very early 1981. All there really was in the home computer market was games. They were so simple. You had to type in the listing of the source code. It was crazy."

It wasn't long before David met Ian Morrison, who shared a love of coding, at their secondary school, Ardrossan Academy. The common bond meant that they would form a working partnership that would take them into the early Nineties. "I wanted to do something innovative and yet industrial," recalls David. "I would have got into electronics, but then personal computers came along. You could build them as kits, but it was the programming that seemed much more fun." Future collaborator Robin Muir also attended the same school as David and Ian but would not become involved with their programming projects until much later.

The computers of choice at the time included the educational favourite BBC Micro, ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64. Although the former was easier to access and the latter boasted far more technical power, it was the ZX Spectrum that drew David and Ian's attention. Initially, Ian began experimenting with BASIC on the PET before upgrading to programming for the 1K ZX81, while Robin Muir would go on to use his dad's abandoned ZX81 to build upon his skills. After programming a 16K game whose name escapes our interviewee, which was taken to a ZX Microfair in 1982, the duo came home with a Spectrum. It was then that work would begin on their first ever arcade conversion, *Galactic Trooper*. The strengths and weaknesses of the Spectrum soon became apparent.

"Weaknesses were the colour and the sound," explains David. "Strength was the main memory to screen memory ratio. The Z80 processor was nice, too, for an 8-bit machine. There was no protected memory space, so when you crashed it you had to start again. So you needed another machine and you pumped the binary in through an RS232 serial link and tested the program. The one thing I remember was the main memory to video memory ratio of approximately 7:1 being far greater than the ratio in alternative machines like the BBC or the Commodore 64. The result was that Spectrum games could have more complex gameplay because there was memory for code and for more levels of graphics. My only other memory is that the colour mechanism really sucked. Low-resolution colour on what was, for the time, a high-resolution display. We had to be creative."

Despite its disadvantages, David felt that the Spectrum was the machine to program for: "The Spectrum, in my opinion, hit the right combination of price point and features and had the right balance of architecture. Machines with a different main memory to screen memory ratio didn't sell as well. I believe that this was because the gameplay wasn't so complex or that their price point was too high to hit the mass market."

Humble beginnings

For a time, David and Ian worked jointly on some simple early creations to see what

INSTANT EXPERT

David Anderson, Ian Morrison and Robin Muir all attended Ardrossan Academy and were 18 years old, living in Ayrshire, Scotland, at the time of the company's formation.

The ZX Microfair in 1982 enabled David and Ian to return home with a Spectrum to code for.

Early games were released for Romik Software and Silversoft before they came up with their own company name.

The name choice came about as a result of trying to outdo Silversoft and US Gold.

The company was officially called Platinum Productions in 1984 with its release of *Lode Runner* for Software Projects.

All games were mapped out on squared paper before their entry on the Spectrum.

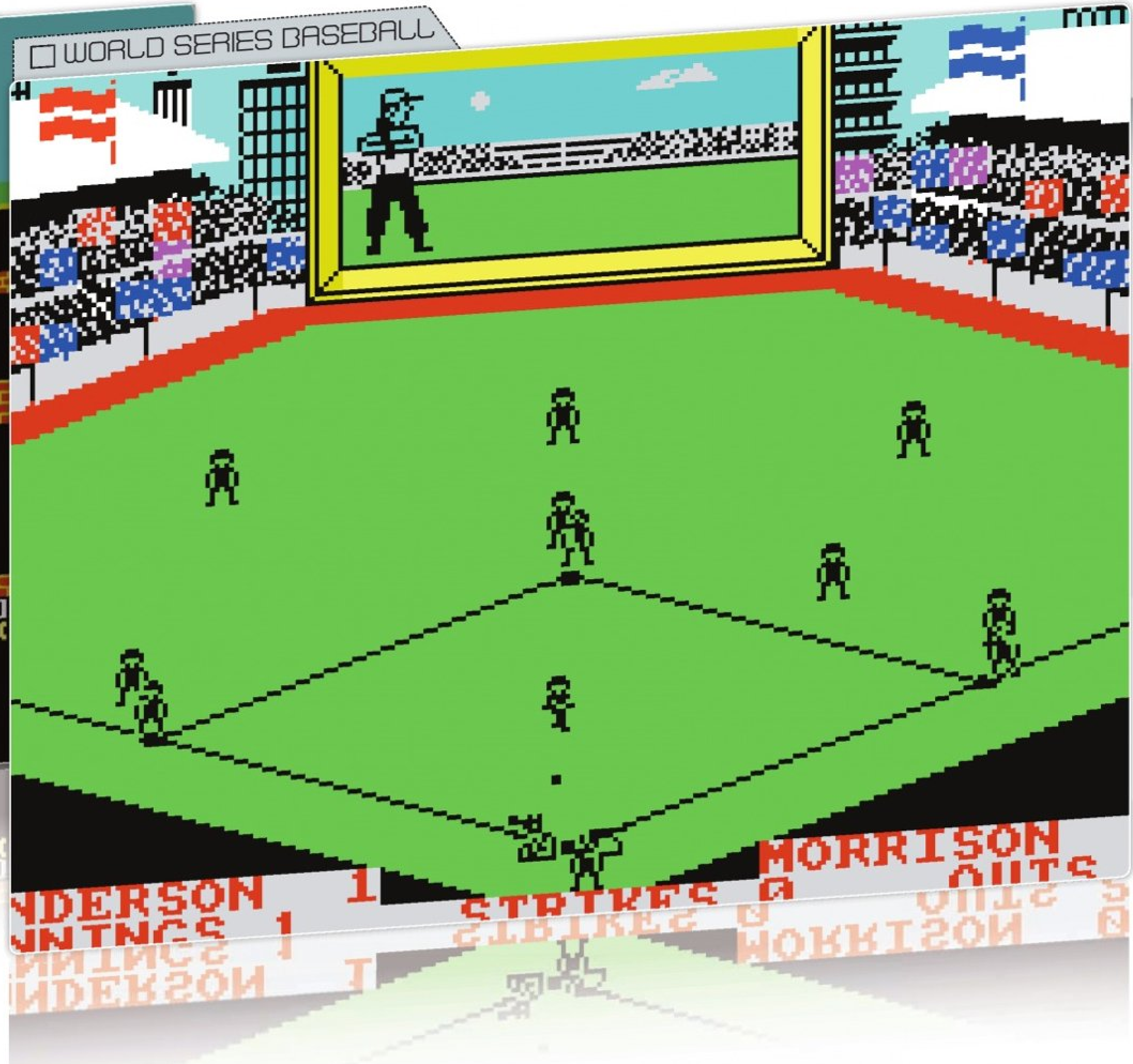
The conversion of *Beach-Head* led to a long-standing arrangement with Ocean for Platinum to be responsible for porting key titles to the Spectrum.

1985 saw the release of eight games, with one in the top ten for every week of the year.

Platinum Productions stopped releasing games in 1986, with subsequent games released as ICE Software until 1991.



WORLD SERIES BASEBALL



“I remember it was fast, furious, fun and definitely no killing. Unusual for its time”

DAVID ANDERSON’S OPINION ON TAPPER



could be accomplished. In 1983, the duo would create four games: *Brain Damage*, *Colour Clash*, *Exterminator* and *Shark Attack*. At this point in time, these titles were known simply as games by David and Ian, as they did not have a development company name.

Brain Damage was a maze-style game that saw players guiding a tank around it while avoiding electronic creations such as the Electron Panzer, Marauder, Centurion and Rogue Program. The goal was to hit one of these to progress to the next level, but with only the ability to fire one blast at a time, this wasn’t always an easy task. *Exterminator* was inspired greatly by *Robotron: 2084* and kept things simple with its visual style but was also incredibly fast, with a lot of moving items on screen at any given time. Both *Brain Damage* and *Exterminator* were released by Silversoft and were received favourably. Menus and routines were created to make the games more user-friendly, including user-definable keys and skill levels, which was not always an option with early Spectrum titles. *Colour Clash*, effectively a clone of the arcade game *Amidar* that sees you colouring squares while avoiding touching enemies, was released by Romik Software, and although it looked incredibly basic, it was a decent effort in porting across the arcade title. *Shark Attack* was also released by Romik – where, for this game only, David and Ian would call themselves Rannoch Creative Designs – and proved to be reminiscent of *Qix*, where a net has to be drawn around an octopus to protect it from the marauding sharks.

While all four games were effective arcade re-creations of their originals, albeit under different names to prevent copyright infringement, the duo found that this didn’t translate well into sales. Anxious to progress with their chosen career path, David and Ian started to approach software houses with their copy of *Exterminator* that had been rewritten to resemble *Robotron: 2084* more closely. It was difficult to find interest until it came to Ocean. Impressed with David and Ian’s arcade-porting abilities, Ocean didn’t want to release a *Robotron*-style game but was very keen on getting its new title, *Beach-Head*, onto the Spectrum. After the pair walked away and created a demo of planes within a fortnight, Ocean commissioned the project and they were given eight weeks to complete it. Released in 1984, it was the game that put them on the map and made them realise that they needed a name: Platinum Productions. “The name is easy,” remembers David. “There had been Silversoft and US Gold; we had to go one better. That business entity emerged after a couple of earlier attempts involving more people.”

Going Platinum

Their impressive work on *Beach-Head* led to an interesting partnership with Ocean

BY THE NUMBERS

2: Number of weeks taken to create a *Beach-Head* demo for Ocean Software.

3: Number of consecutive *Crash* Smashes awarded to Platinum Productions titles.

4: Number of the core team present at Platinum Productions: David Anderson, Ian Morrison, Robin Muir and Alan Laird.

5: Weeks taken to create *Tapper* on the Spectrum.

7:1: Main memory to video memory ratio on the Spectrum, greater than the BBC Micro and Commodore 64.

1981: The year when David, Ian and Robin started to learn how to program.

1985: The year that saw Platinum Productions release eight successful games.

9: Number of games that officially carried the Platinum Productions development name.

150: Number of maximum sprites that the team could get on screen at any one time.



» [Spectrum] The first stage of *Beach-Head* sees you take on submarines and overhead aircraft.



TIMELINE

1981 DAVID ANDERSON AND IAN MORRISON JOIN FORCES AS A PROGRAMMING TEAM

1982 THE PAIR ARRIVE HOME FROM ZX MICROFAIR WITH A SPECTRUM AND BEGIN WORK ON *GALACTIC TROOPER*

1983 *COLOUR CLASH* RELEASED BY ROMIK SOFTWARE

▶ Software that would lead to numerous hits. "[Ian Morrison] and I had a long-standing arrangement with Ocean Software, who were partners in US Gold," explains David. "US Gold made it their business to license American arcade and Commodore or Apple games titles and convert them to European platforms like the ZX Spectrum." Yet while their talent was undeniable, David felt his sales abilities enabled them to receive these opportunities. He quickly settled into a dual role, of co-creator and something of an expert at sales pitches.

"I tended to be the guy who did the cold-calling and the marketing. I also did half the coding and drew all the graphics. Ian tended to be less public. He had a stammer, so I got to do the phone calls with new business partners. It took sales skill to get in to see a publisher and to sell them on working with the firm. We had that skill. Jon Woods at Ocean once told me that the secret to my success was twofold: I had the skill to get into his office, and the talent to stay in it. In other words, I had the sales and marketing skills. He called me back because he asked his partner, 'Who the hell are Platinum Productions?' We got invited back again and again because we developed good games, with high quality, very quickly."

According to David, every game created was approached in the same way: "We used to draw the graphics on squared paper first before entering them into the machine. In the early days, we coded the graphics in as hexadecimal numbers. Later, we developed our screen capture technology. So we used off-the-shelf art packages and then captured the graphics – with masks, if appropriate – and stored them in a format we devised."

1984 was also the year in which their earlier creation, *Galactic Trooper*, would be published by Romik Software, just before the pair gave themselves a company title. Although it doesn't hold up so well these days, it was a competent re-creation of Stern Electronics' coin-op, *Astro Invader*, despite the fact that there were quite a few games of this ilk already available on the market at the time, and further cemented the team's skill at arcade conversions.

With a company name and high-profile work starting to trickle in from Ocean in conjunction with US Gold and Imagine Software, the duo quickly realised that more people were needed. Old school friends Robin Muir and Alan Laird were recruited, along with Mark Craig. "Robin did music for us," David remembers. "Alan worked with us from time to time as a programmer. Alan and I are still good friends. He hosts my web site. We're in regular touch. Mark helped us with office admin work and with non-programming tasks like data entry."

Platinum hits

After initially being led to believe by Software Projects that it would release the pair's *Robotron* arcade game, the project fell through and Platinum went on to program the addictive *Lode Runner* instead. *Zaxxon* would prove to be the next release for Platinum Productions, which sadly remains the sole blip on an otherwise impressive catalogue. The next effort, however, *Raid Over Moscow*, would go on to achieve critical acclaim and was a superb conversion of the Commodore 64 version. Not only did Platinum Productions achieve the impressive feat of creating a game that was quick and responsive to play, but it also managed to make it a colourful endeavour that really made full use of the hardware's



» [Spectrum] Another level from *Raid Over Moscow*, re-created beautifully.



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



David Anderson
After leaving the videogame industry in 1991, David went into software engineering as a senior director, working for Bill Gates at his Corbis company that licensed stock photography and artist imagery. He then went on to found his own company in Seattle called David J Anderson and Associates (**www.agilemanagement.net**), which is a consulting firm that creates new methods of management for worker industries.

Ian Morrison
After Platinum Productions, Ian was involved with creating software for Probe Software before taking a sabbatical from the games industry and pursuing further education. Between 2006 and 2011, he went to the University of Alberta, where he gained a BSc in computer science. During this time, Ian worked at BioWare for nine months as an assistant technical designer. He was responsible for developing level layouts, scripts and plot for *Dragon Age: Origins*, *Dragon Age: The Stone Prisoner* DLC, and the *Dragon Age: Awakenings* expansion pack, and also worked on some of the game's cinematic design. In 2010, Ian worked as a research assistant on the University of Alberta's entry for the *Brood War* AI contest at the AI and Interactive Digital Entertainment conference.

Alan Laird
Alan went on to finish his undergraduate degree in computer science and completed a postgraduate degree. After that, he spent five years working in America and Tokyo at Baring Securities (later known as ING Barings). In 2000, Alan managed a development team with Merrill Lynch, specialising in real-time stock trading systems in C++ based in Tokyo. Currently, he helps maintain David Anderson's Agile Management website.

Robin Muir
Although Robin pursued music with a band (Locozip) upon leaving Platinum, he went on to complete an accounting course. He has kept a low profile since, and it's unclear as to what he is doing currently.

1983 – *BRAIN DAMAGE* RELEASED BY SILVERSOFT

1983 – *EXTERMINATOR* RELEASED BY SILVERSOFT

1984 – THE DUO APPROACH SOFTWARE HOUSES WITH A REWORKED VERSION OF *EXTERMINATOR* AND STRIKE A DEAL WITH OCEAN TO WORK ON A CONVERSION OF THE COMMODORE 64 VERSION OF *BEACH-HEAD* TO THE SPECTRUM

1984 – *BEACH-HEAD* IS RELEASED TO CRITICAL ACCLAIM. RELATIONSHIP WITH OCEAN SOFTWARE ESTABLISHED

1984 – *GALACTIC TROOPER* IS RELEASED BY ROMIK SOFTWARE

1984 – THE COMPANY TAKES THE NAME PLATINUM PRODUCTIONS

1984 – ARCADE CONVERSION OF *LODE RUNNER* IS RELEASED BY SOFTWARE PROJECTS

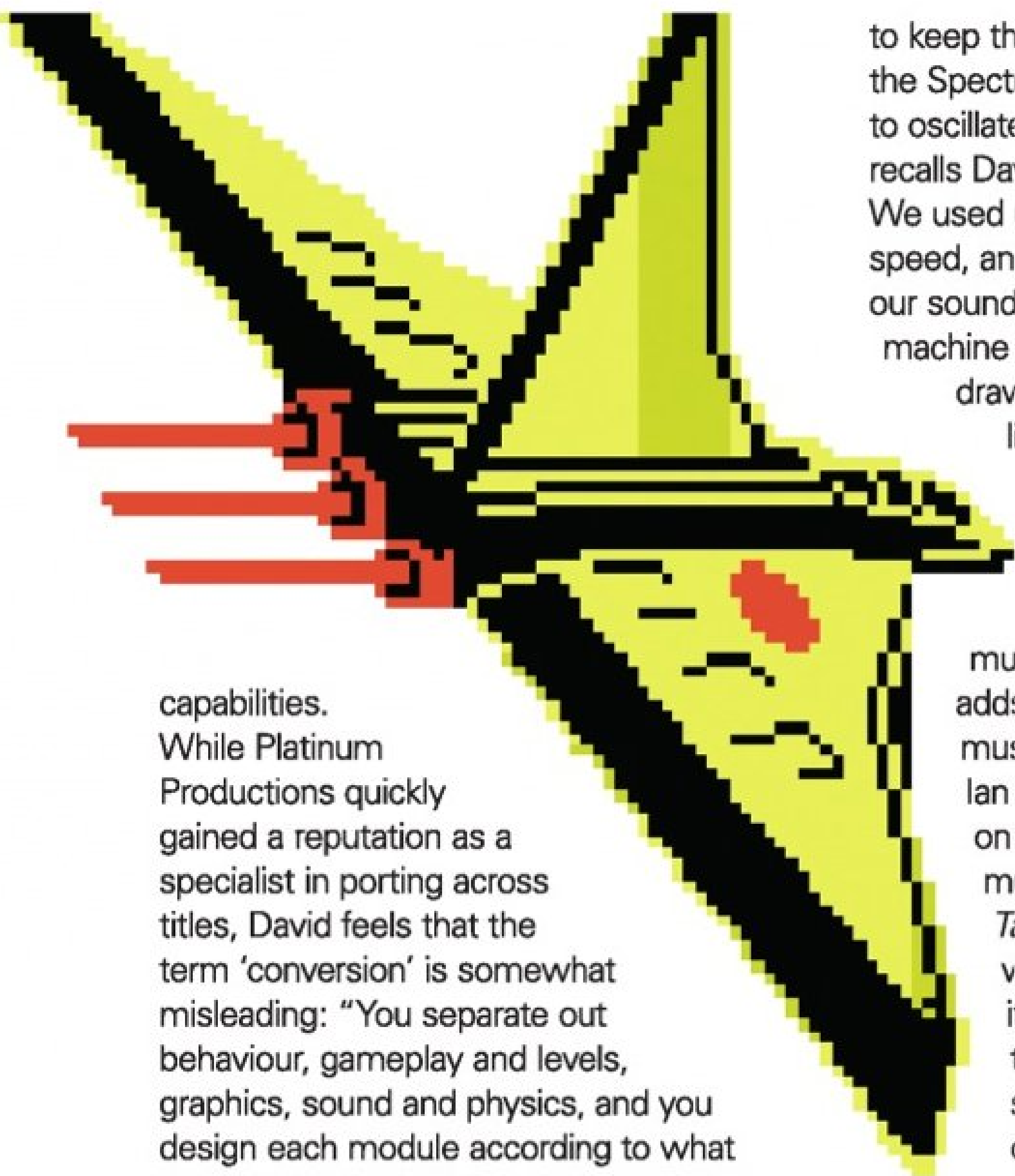
1985 – ROBIN MUIR, ALAN LAIRD AND MARK CRAIG JOIN PLATINUM PRODUCTIONS

1985 – *WORLD SERIES BASEBALL, WORLD SERIES BASKETBALL, THE DAM BUSTERS, RAID OVER MOSCOW, TAPPER* AND *ZAXXON* ARE RELEASED, WITH ALL GAMES BAR THE LATTER RECEIVING DECENT REVIEW SCORES

1985 – *RAID OVER MOSCOW, WORLD SERIES BASEBALL* AND *TAPPER* RECEIVE *CRASH* SMASH AWARDS AND THE TEAM IS INTERVIEWED FOR THE MAGAZINE

1985 – *RAMBO* AND *BEACH-HEAD II: THE DICTATOR STRIKES BACK* ARE RELEASED

1986 – DAVID WORKS SOLO ON *KUNG-FU MASTER* AND IAN WORKS ON OTHER PROJECTS FOR US GOLD



capabilities. While Platinum Productions quickly gained a reputation as a specialist in porting across titles, David feels that the term 'conversion' is somewhat misleading: "You separate out behaviour, gameplay and levels, graphics, sound and physics, and you design each module according to what you observe in the original game. The term 'conversion' is a misnomer. We didn't convert anything. We copied."

The high work ethic and dedication to their projects meant that they became known as the people to go to for fast, accurate conversions. "We were a very quick team. Our quality was always incredibly high. We had incredible attention to detail. We tested everything very rigorously as we developed it. I think the publishers were generally stunned at how fast we turned things around. If you look back at the history from the time, we were delivering a title every month. 1985 was a golden year for us; we had a title in the top ten every week out of 52."

World Series Baseball was next ("One of our best games"), but the title of most impressive release of them all has to be handed to the conversion of *Tapper*. Unexpectedly, given the project, the team used some of the techniques from *Raid Over Moscow* to turn it around in a speedy five-week timeframe. It also proved to be the trickiest conversion the company had ever worked on. "There were two main challenges: how to have so many graphics moving on screen simultaneously, and how to keep the music playing constantly when the Spectrum uses main processor time to oscillate the speaker to make sound," recalls David. "We had to compromise. We used unmasked exclusive-or sprites for speed, and we worked really, really hard on our sound algorithms. I copied the arcade machine as closely as possible. I used to draw all my own graphics. I have a little skill as an artist."

Music for the game was the biggest nightmare due to its looping nature and took the longest to sort out. "The music was a horrible challenge," adds David. "Robin Muir was our music guy. He worked out the tunes. Ian and I did a lot of hard work on the sound algorithms to allow music to play continually." While *Tapper* looks strange as a game, with the sprites lacking colour, it was an essential compromise to get it to run at an accurate speed. "We kept the characters and the animation and the appearance from a monochromatic, cartoon aspect. We lost the colour and the masking."

Tapper went on to receive the company's third *Crash* Smash award, although David admits that it does have one critical flaw that few people will discover. "Eventually, there is too much going on and the processor gets



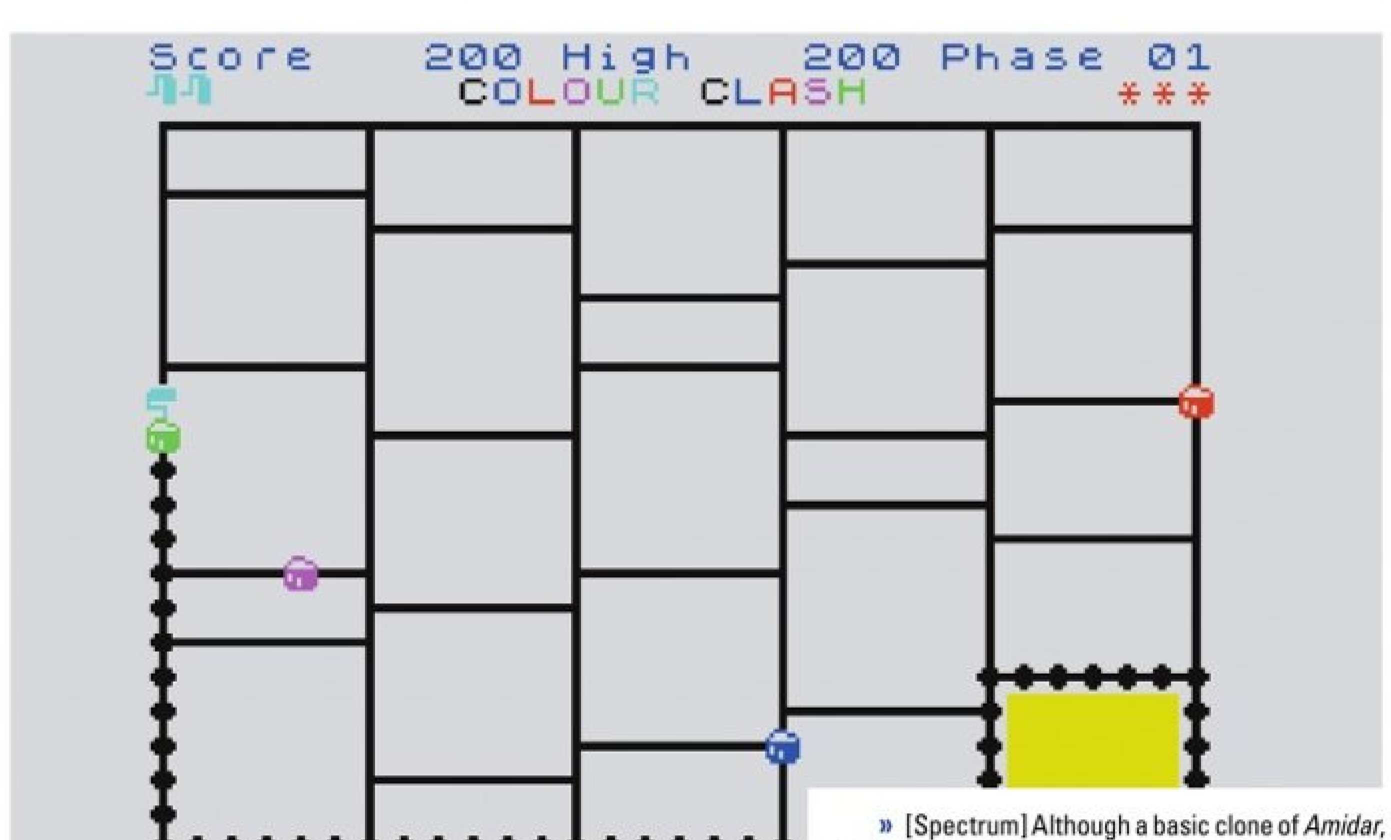




» Platinum Productions: (left to right) Mark Craig, Alan Laird, David Anderson, Robin Muir, Ian Morrison.

"The jet set lifestyle. The regular flying, the fast cars, the overnight train to London"

▶ HIGHLIGHTS OF BEING AT PLATINUM PRODUCTIONS



» [Spectrum] Although a basic clone of *Amidar*, *Colour Clash* captures the core gameplay with ease.

CRASH TIME



A *Crash* Smash award was an honour that was handed out by the writers of *Crash* magazine for games that scored highly and were recommended as essential purchases for its readers. Three games from Platinum Productions achieved these accolades in consecutive issues, a feat never replicated by any other company in the magazine's history. *Raid Over Moscow* soared in at 92% in issue 15 (April 1985), *World Series Baseball* hit a home run with a score of 91% in issue 16 (May 1985), and Tapper gulped down a not-too-shabby 89% in issue 17 (June 1985).





» [Spectrum] *Tapper* was an excellent conversion, effortlessly highlighting Platinum's coding skills.

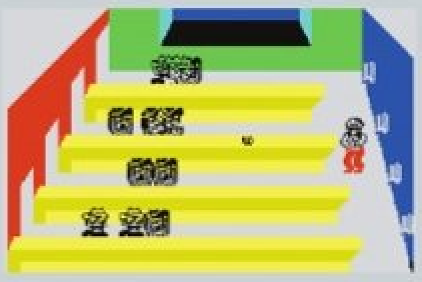
SIX OF THE BEST



Lode Runner [1984]
Minimal in its approach – no background music and few sound effects – the simplicity of the port means that it's one of the most playable conversions. Controls are responsive while animation is detailed, despite the small characters.



Raid Over Moscow [1985]
Raid sees you take on the role of a squadron leader on a US space station, sent on a mission to destroy the Soviet missile sites and take out their defence base in Moscow. An excellent port of the successful Commodore 64 title.



Tapper [1985]
An excellent conversion of a classic, *Tapper* casts you as a barman, serving punters their beer while trying to avoid breaking any glasses. Visually off-putting at first, but responsive controls and quick gameplay make it worthy of attention.



World Series Baseball [1985]
Perhaps a curious choice, but *World Series Baseball* is an addictive representation of the sport. With close-ups on the big screen, fast gameplay, and little touches like dancing girls, it's easy to see why it received a *Crash* Smash award.

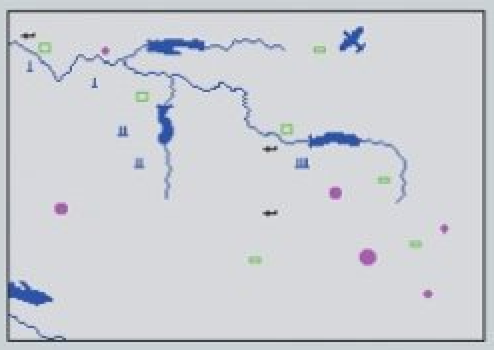


Rambo [1985]
The one game that didn't involve any porting, *Rambo* is an enjoyable action game and surprisingly decent for a movie tie-in. With the ability to explore, shoot and collect weapons, *Rambo* has a nice balance between action and strategy.



Beach-Head [1984]
Beach-Head has you taking part in a dogfight, traversing an underground passage, fighting on the beaches and destroying a citadel. It was Platinum Productions' work on *Beach-Head* that led to further work from Ocean.

TWO TO AVOID



The Dam Busters [1985]
Based on the book and movie, *The Dam Busters* pits you in several roles (pilot, front and rear gunner, bomber, engineer and navigator) as you aim to destroy the Germans' intricate dam system during the World War II bombing raids. It's also officially endorsed by the RAF 617 Squadron, a licensing factor that helped with its appeal among history buffs at the time. Created as a cross between a shooter and simulation, *The Dam Busters* struggles to succeed at either and, while not a terrible game, is not one of Platinum Productions' finest.

Zaxxon [1985]
Sega's arcade title *Zaxxon* was always memorable for its 3D effect, and after a decent port to the Commodore 64 hopes were high for the Spectrum release. Sadly, *Zaxxon* was one step too far for the Spectrum. Although playable, the graphics are jerky while the angle effect isn't implemented well, making it difficult to judge firing at enemies and avoiding obstacles. Controls are unresponsive while the shadow of the ship, pivotal to decisions in the original, is a useless guide in this conversion.



overloaded and the gameplay gets horrible. However, you have to be exceptionally good to achieve that. Our skill as developers was to ensure that we got all the power from the Spectrum we could so that there could be a maximum number of sprites on screen. My memory is that our theoretical maximum was over 150."

David does have fond memories of *Tapper*, for all its troubled development. "I remember it was fast, furious, fun and no killing. Unusual for its time. Perhaps it is still unusual. My memory of *Tapper* is that we were incredibly proud of the outcome, given the limitations of the Spectrum. Platinum Productions was a firm that specialised in doing games that others said couldn't be done, like *Beach-Head* and *Zaxxon*. *Tapper* was another of these. It ought to have been impossible on a Spectrum. We were young and arrogant – nothing was impossible."

The Dam Busters was released within the same year, with a conversion of *Beach-Head II* – another hit for the company – to follow. Work on *Rambo* also commenced, and the team was given more freedom as long as it suited the licence. Having never been given the go-ahead to work on a *Robotron* clone, it was an ideal opportunity to work in directional controls and closely imitate the *Commando* arcade game. It was a terrific time for the company.

With a steady flow of games out on the market at a rate of one a month, it enabled Platinum to make a small fortune, although the exact amount is unknown. "The money involved was trivial compared to today. We funded ourselves and we spent the money when we received it," recalls David. It meant that, for a while, they were like superstars. "We had the jet set lifestyle. The regular commuter flying, the fast cars, the overnight train to London."

Super Soccer, a playable although not outstanding football title, was created as a side project by David and did not boast the Platinum Productions development label. In order to get the hang of the animation for the football players, David got Mark Craig, the office helper and occasional programmer, to help out: "He acted as the model for *Super Soccer*. He kicked a ball around in my garden while I sat on the roof and took photos of him. I then drew all the animation positions from those photos."

Yet for all the porting and licensing antics, was the company ever tempted to branch out and embark on its own projects? It seems that this was never under consideration, according to David: "I think we knew our strengths – we were good at software engineering and mathematics. We could do physics engines and graphics engines and sound engines. We were also fairly savvy with business. We understood

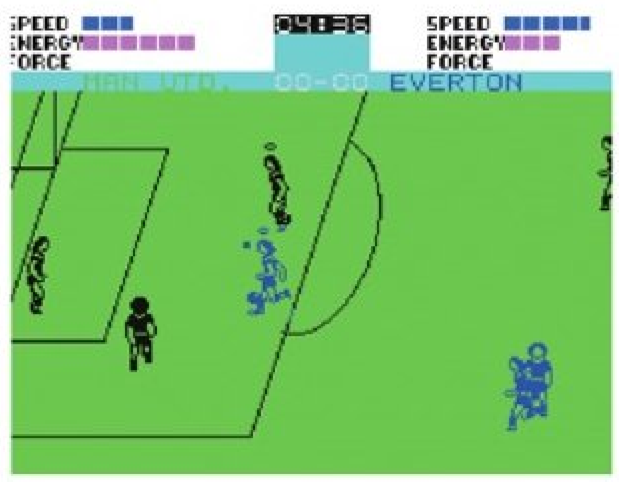
> **"We had incredible attention to detail. We tested everything very rigorously as we developed it"**
>
> ONE OF THE SECRETS TO THE COMPANY'S SUCCESS







» [Spectrum] Although *Galactic Trooper* looks hideous, it was David and Ian's first attempt at a conversion.



» [Spectrum] Mark Craig posed for photographs, which David took from his roof, so the animation could be created for *Super Soccer*.



branding. We weren't great gameplay designers or game designers."

Final curtain call

In 1987, the team at Platinum Productions started to head in slightly different directions. David took something of a back seat while Ian went to work on an arcade conversion of *OutRun*, once again on their favourite machine, the ZX Spectrum 48K. In 1989, David and Ian formed ICE Software along with Martin Kane, which would broaden out in scope to specialise not just in conversions for the Spectrum and C64, but also some 16-bit computers, including the Amiga and Atari ST. Titles to come out of that stable included *Turbo OutRun*, *Chase HQ II: Special Criminal Investigation*, *Hydra* and *Cisco Heat*, although, with these, Ian along with Alan Laird and a few others took on the main programming duties. Both *Turbo OutRun* (Spectrum and Amiga) and *Special Criminal Investigation* (Spectrum and Amiga) attracted criticism for being too similar to the original games, while *Cisco Heat* (Spectrum, C64, Atari ST and Amiga) didn't play well or receive favourable reviews. *Hydra* had ports to the Spectrum and Amiga, but neither conversion translated well to the home computer format.

Yet it was the 16-bit era where the industry started to change. With it came larger development costs, more financial risk and a slow decline in the 'bedroom programmer' approach to game development. By 1991, enough was enough and ICE Software closed its doors, with David exiting the videogame industry. When asked to sum up his highlights at Platinum Productions, David has a few to mention: "The launch of *Beach-Head* in 1984. The *Crash* Smash reviews in 1985. The interview in *Crash* in 1985."

"It got harder when the 16-bit machines arrived," he admits. "I eventually got out of games because of the fickle nature of reviews and the increasing costs and financial risks. It was becoming too risky for individual development companies who have all their eggs in the one basket. The publishers aggregate risk across a portfolio; for us developers, we had no risk-balancing strategy. By the early Nineties, it was necessary to achieve economy of scale in order to survive that one bad review. I've done a lot of jobs, mostly as a manager in the intervening years. Most recently, I ran software engineering for Bill Gates at his Corbis company that mostly licenses stock photography and artistic imagery. Now my firm help IT departments and software development companies all over the world improve their effectiveness and efficiency. I spend a lot of time travelling and I speak at conferences a lot. I wrote a book on managing effective software development teams." Having spent over 25 years within the software industry in some capacity, David doesn't know what else he would have done with his life. "I've never done anything other than software development – or management of software development – all my life." Ian also went on to other things, although he did briefly return to the world of game development, working on *Robotron 64* in 1998 and for BioWare in 2009 on *Dragon Age: Origins*.

While Platinum Productions in title only officially existed for a few short years, its high-quality output of arcade conversions and the developer's previous experience meant that its impact on the 8-bit marketplace was quite significant. It proved that complex arcade titles of the day could translate well to the Spectrum if the strengths of the format were harnessed properly and weaknesses were addressed. The fact that key titles such as *Beach-Head*, *Raid Over Moscow* and *Tapper* still retain their classic status among the Spectrum community is testament to the team's skills. When asked if there was anything that could have been done differently, David is satisfied with the way things turned out. "With any project there are always things you might change, but looking back from this distance I think we made a lot of right choices," he says. "We sacrificed masked sprites to get performance and we focused on the atmosphere and fun of the gameplay. The decisions we made delivered a game that was in the spirit of the original and maximised the capabilities of the Spectrum."

BEACHED UP



While the original trilogy of *Beach-Head*, *Raid Over Moscow* and *Beach-Head II: The Dictator Strikes Back* were excellent pieces of software on the C64 and Spectrum, there were additional games released that attached themselves to the same series. An updated version called *Beach-Head 2000* was released on the PC and Mac that took the basic idea of the opening classic warship level and created a whole new game around it, with waves of enemies to defeat. Although it tries to appeal to its retro background, the fact that it is the same type of level repeated misses the appeal of the original. An additional game was released in 2002 named, originally, *Beach-Head 2002*, which took the exact same idea, just altering the graphics slightly and adding the odd tweak here and there. If you haven't had enough of your memories being trampled over by this point, it's also possible to find the download-only version of *Beach-Head: Desert War*, which is a remake of the previous game, only set in Iraq and introducing a heat-seeking missile. Oh, and day/night cycles. Aren't you lucky people?





Zynaps

SILLY NAME, GREAT GAME

» RETROREVIVAL



» ZX SPECTRUM
» HEWSON CONSULTANTS
» 1987

Software Studios' legendary conversion of *R-Type* is widely regarded as one of the machine's best shoot-'em-ups, and it's easy to see why. As great a conversion as it is though, it's a little too sedate – an issue with the original game as well – for my tastes. I prefer shooters with a little more zip to them; shooters with a little more style and pizzazz; shooters like Zynaps.

Dominic Robinson's *Zynaps* is one such example, and while I prefer the Amstrad offering – why wouldn't I? – I've got many fond memories of the Spectrum release. It was and still remains a great version of the game thanks to Dominic's slick coding, some gorgeous sprite work from the legendary Steve Crow, and a suitably punchy tune by Graftgold's Steve Turner.

Having successfully converted the supposedly unconvertible *Uridium* to the Spectrum, Dominic's first standalone game turned out to be just as impressive. Running at a constant 25 frames per second and effortlessly throwing around 16 different sprites with abandon, it's a graphically impressive beast of a game that rarely boasts attribute clash or other graphical issues usually found on the system.

It's also tough as old boots, with spitefully placed gun turrets and a constant swarm of enemies that will do their best to rob you of your precious three lives. Indeed, it will take many futile attempts to even complete the first level – let alone all 16 stages – if you're not familiar with the genre, and it just gets tougher the further you get into it.

And yet it really doesn't matter, because most of the time death will come about through your own incompetence and not because of unfair attack patterns or poor collision detection. You'll keep plugging away because everything fits together so perfectly, and because it's just so polished and fun to play. Sure, it's not as original as it would like to think it is – bar power-ups, it shares many similarities with *Gradius* – but it's a highly enjoyable shoot-'em-up with plenty of replayability. And ultimately, that's what really matters. *



THE HISTORY OF SOULCALIBUR

SOUL EDGE BURST ONTO ARCADE SCREENS IN 1996 AND IMMEDIATELY IMPRESSED GAMERS WITH ITS STRIKING CHARACTERS AND WEAPON-BASED COMBAT. NOW, WITH THE RELEASE OF SOULCALIBUR V, DEVELOPERS FROM THE SERIES LOOK BACK AT THE FRANCHISE'S 16-YEAR HISTORY. RYAN KING ASKS THEM IF THE SOUL STILL BURNS

"Welcome to the stage of history." The line that opens all *SoulCalibur* games defines them as well as a game's intro could. It carried an almost theatrical sense of drama – a nod to the historic setting – and a slight awkwardness that makes sense given how *SoulCalibur* flexed ideas of honour, intrigue and weapon-chasing in a game that was about hitting the other player until he couldn't stand up again.

SoulCalibur's story can be traced back to the mid-Nineties, shortly after Sega revolutionised fighting games with its very first attempt at a 3D take on the genre – *Virtua Fighter*. Released in Japanese arcades at the end of 1993, even before Capcom had finished pumping out *Street Fighter II* sequels – *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* was still a year away – its impact on the genre was immediate. Just as console gaming was starting to move towards 3D, so fighting games would do the same, as development studios eyed up what Sega was doing with Akira, Kage et al and decided they could do better.

Sure enough, Sega wouldn't have the genre to itself, as Namco weighed in with two powerhouse 3D fighting games of its own. The first, *Tekken*, became *Virtua Fighter*'s immediate rival when it hit Japanese arcades just 12 months later. Its eccentric design contrasted with *Virtua Fighter*'s grounded aesthetic, offering giant androids, bears and a wrestler in a leopard mask. It seemed that 3D fighters already had their equivalent of *Street Fighter* vs *Mortal Kombat*.

Yet there was another contender from the Namco stable that joined the fray in early 1996: *Soul Edge*. It immediately stood out thanks to its weapon-based brawling, which saw the likes of Japanese swordsman Mitsurugi, caveman Rock and the eccentric Voldo star alongside six other characters. It wasn't just the weapons that saw *Soul Edge* carve out its own identity, though. The game was set in 1584 and everything about it matched its timeline – the look of the characters, the orchestral music, the themed stages. It was a gloriously imaginative take on medieval times that provided a natural home for the duelling nature of the gameplay. While *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* were seen as rivals, *Soul Edge* felt different enough that it could stand apart.

"By making the theme a weapon-based fighter, the team believed that exhilarating and impressive gameplay, variety of characters and an appealing story would be born," says *SoulCalibur V* producer Hisaharu Tago. "From that belief, *Soul Edge* was created. [Namco] have been experimenting on weapon-based fighting action with concrete movements using

the multijoint technology years before releasing *Soul Edge*, and finally, with the high-performance board of PlayStation, the team back then was able to make it a reality."

Soul Edge wasn't just *Virtua Fighter* with swords, though. It smartly built its gameplay mechanics around the weapons, with the Guard Impact mechanic being a mainstay of the series for many iterations. Players could deflect attacks with a well-timed Guard Impact, which served as a parry and left their opponent vulnerable, apart from the ability to parry back. This could lead to a long parrying back-and-forth until one player got the timing wrong or tried something different to break the deadlock, such as throwing. Also included was the ability to walk towards and away from the screen. It sounds dull, but this gave *Soul Edge* a 3D feel missing from other games in the genre, rather than making it seem like a 3D fighter on a 2D axis. Indeed, it would take until *Tekken Tag Tournament* and *Virtua Fighter 3* for those series to implement sidestepping as universal defensive options for each character.

So while *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* were the first, *Soul Edge* was the game that found its own identity, independent of what the rest of the genre was doing. "I believe the game was born from a completely different thought,"

» [Arcade] Eccentric Voldo was in the original *Soul Edge* and remains the strangest character in fighting games.



"Namco had been experimenting on weapon-based fighting years before releasing Soul Edge"

continues Tago. "I do believe that *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* are products that have very high quality. However, the *Soul* series was born from a completely different thinking of tactics using weapons. This was shown by implementing the movement to the front and back, making use of the 3D environment."

One interesting mechanic was that characters used their weapons to block, which would slowly chip away at a weapon gauge meter. Once the gauge was depleted through repeatedly blocking, the weapon would smash, leaving players to fight the rest of the round using their bare hands and feet. The implementation was a little crude – every character had the same, generic moves list when fighting unarmed – but it was surprising to see it dropped so quickly and so quietly from further sequels.

"As far as I heard from the staff members at that time, they were concerned about whether *Soul Edge*, having battles with weapons and making use of the 3D environment, was difficult for users to play at the product stage," recalls Tago, explaining why Namco dropped the idea for future games. "Thus, what they implemented was the weapon break and the system of locking one sword with another in order to tell the audiences the characteristic of the weapon. However, in *SoulCalibur*, which was produced with the evolved technology two years after *Soul Edge*, by implementing eight-way run, a three-dimensional manoeuvre was completed. Without having to depend on a visual performance of weapon break or locking swords, the team was able to always achieve a 'three-dimensional tactic with weapons'."

It wasn't long before *Soul Edge* received its first overhaul, with *Soul Edge Ver. II* hitting the arcades in May 1996, just four months after the original. The main reason for the new version was to tone down the difficulty, which had been stopping the majority of players from ever completing it. Namco also made a few other changes, such as turning Cervantes into a playable character and tweaking the moves lists. The arcades served as the perfect testing ground



» [Dreamcast] Thanks to his heavy-hitting moves, Nightmare has always been a… well, you can guess.



GUEST CHARACTERS



HEIHACHI

Taken from: *Tekken*

◆ Joining Yoshimitsu from *Tekken*, Heihachi was the most grounded of the console-exclusive characters, appearing in the PS2 version of *SoulCalibur II*. He retained his trademark moves from *Tekken* and proved a fine addition.



LINK

Taken from: *The Legend Of Zelda*

◆ Namco really let its imagination take over for the implementation of Link in *SoulCalibur II*'s GameCube edition. Not only did he have standard sword and shield attacks, but he could also use a bow and even throw bombs, making Link highly versatile.



SPAWN

Taken from: *Spawn*

◆ Not as outrageous an addition as it might have seemed, as giant fighters were already established in *SoulCalibur*. Despite the Todd McFarlane origins, this Xbox-exclusive was quite limp and never matched up to the carnage in the comics.



YODA

Taken from: *Star Wars*

◆ A design challenge, given his stature, Yoda ended up both weak and hated. He was impossible to throw, but this was balanced by his low damage output, making each match an endurance test of how many hits you could land.



DARTH VADER

Taken from: *Star Wars*

◆ With his trademark Lightsaber and Force Choke, Vader was faithful to the *Star Wars* villain yet didn't quite gel in *SoulCalibur*, which is based on fantasy but rarely implausible. Darth Vader was initially exclusive to the PlayStation 3 version of *SoulCalibur IV*.



STARKILLER

Taken from: *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*

◆ LucasArts had created a new character for *The Force Unleashed*, who proved a better fit than Yoda or Vader, but his range of powers still meant there was an odd clash of styles with the *SoulCalibur* characters.



EZIO

Taken from: *Assassin's Creed*

◆ His reliance on gunplay isn't as odd as it seems, given that Cervantes has always employed flintlock pistols alongside his sword attacks. The team prefer Ezio as the guest character to the *Star Wars* ones, as they don't have to come up with his moves.



for the console release, which would expand on the features seen in this upgrade.

Soul Edge was released on the PlayStation in Japan on December 1996, taking until May 1997 to hit European shelves as *Soul Blade*. The name change was Namco wanting to avoid a potential infringement problem with Edge Games, yet it wasn't just the name that changed – Edge Master mode was included, essentially serving as story mode, while each character received a new costume, new weapons and interactive endings. European fans even got a completely unexpected change when Li Long's nunchaku were swapped out for a three-sectioned staff, thanks to the UK's censorship laws at the time.

Soul Blade was the best conversion of any fighter to consoles at that time, thanks to the wealth of extra features packed in. *Virtua Fighter 2* was released around the same time, but Sega's battles to fit it onto the Saturn led to sacrificing minor elements such as the bridge on Shun Di's stage. *Soul Blade* on the PlayStation had no such problems and stood tall as the best arcade conversion, aided by the Namco Arcade Stick peripheral. The critical acclaim for *Soul Blade* was clearly acknowledged by Namco when *Tekken 2* arrived on the PlayStation, also packing a generous helping of extras over the arcade.

"At that time, [Namco] excelled in arcade games and we were able to make various challenges in that best stage," explains Tago. "Creating something fabulous for the arcade and bringing that to the console is similar to the concept of enjoying restaurant meals even at home, and I believe we were able to have many people enjoy that with satisfaction."

If *Soul Edge* was the start, it would be the sequel that ensured that Namco's series became a household name, and not just because it kept the same title in its transition from arcade to console. *SoulCalibur* was released in arcades during summer 1998 and would find its biggest audience on the Dreamcast a year later, where it was a launch title for Sega's console in North America and Europe.

The longer gestation period meant *SoulCalibur* would not only match its arcade version but significantly improve on it, despite Namco only having seven months to get everything ready for the Dreamcast's launch. New modes were

THE COMPETITION

SoulCalibur isn't the only weapons-based fighting game series

BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN (1994)



◆ The closest any game has come to successfully aping *SoulCalibur*, it was a weapons-based fighter that made a crude attempt at side-stepping with the shoulder buttons. While it was a popular launch title and technically innovative, the overall quality was lacking and it was left by the wayside.

LAST BRONX (1996)



◆ Another game from Sega using its *Virtua Fighter* engine, *Last Bronx* had a stronger focus on weapons – wooden swords, hammers, Chinese flails and tonfa were the order of the day here. It wasn't quite as popular as *Fighting Vipers* as the *Virtua Fighter* formula wasn't as exciting outside the main series by now, but it's still an interesting curio.

THE LAST BLADE (1997)



◆ SNK's offering arrived when 2D fighting games were at an all-time low in popularity, and thus neither *The Last Blade* nor its sequel ever saw release outside Japan. It remains one of SNK's more popular fighting games, though, and became an import favourite, particularly after Hibiki and her concealed sword found fame in *Capcom vs SNK 2*.

BUSHIDO BLADE (1997)



◆ One of the most innovative fighting games ever made. Developer Light Weight decided to go down the realism route with its one-on-one weapons fighter and, as a result, most hits caused instant death. Players could also explore the level, creating a bizarre but brilliant hybrid that felt like what would happen if you meshed *Power Stone* and *SoulCalibur* together.



becoming the norm for home releases and *SoulCalibur* packed in a hefty selection: Team Battle, Survival, Training, Mission mode, Battle Theater and Exhibition mode. Even better, all the backgrounds were rendered in full 3D for the Dreamcast version, a huge leap from the flat 2D efforts of the arcade backgrounds.

Being a new game in the series, *SoulCalibur* brought with it a wealth of new characters – Xianghua, Ivy and Maxi were some of the new faces, while Yoshimitsu was brought in from *Tekken*, symbolic of the close relationship between the teams at Namco HQ. With so many extra fighting styles added to the mix, it wasn't easy to balance, and one character stood out as a much tougher fit than the others.

"It was, of course, Ivy," Tago admits, referring to the character's whip-like sword. "There are many unique weapons in *SoulCalibur*, and I heard that it was something very difficult to adjust. The difference in reach with Ivy's weapon was a hurdle. I've also heard that it was a huge challenge to put in the game in terms of the program calculation and capacity of the memory."

With *Tekken* and *SoulCalibur* growing at Namco, efforts were made to further differentiate the two series beyond the medieval theme and weapons of the latter. For *SoulCalibur*, eight-way movement was introduced. While hardly the sexiest-sounding gameplay innovation, it placed emphasis on movement and darting around the ring, which played nicely into the ring-out mechanic that *Tekken* lacked.

This leaves the small matter of the question that's bugged fighting game fans for years: why the sequel was *SoulCalibur* and not *Soul Edge II*. The reason is simple enough – Namco didn't just see *SoulCalibur* as a mere sequel, hence the new name. "*SoulCalibur* was developed as a new product rather than a sequel, with the idea that there was a huge evolution in the concept, which also was our ultimate goal, fighting with weapons using the 3D environment," explains Tago. As for why it was called *SoulCalibur*? It was a portmanteau of 'soul' and 'calibur', taken from King Arthur's sword, Excalibur.

Yet the best was still to come. *SoulCalibur II* was a further high point for the series and is often remembered not only as the best, but often



» [360] Unfairly saddled with the 'button basher' label early on, Maxi is now quite complicated to play.

» [360] The Xbox Live Arcade release of *SoulCalibur* freshened up the visuals, even if it failed to add online play.



the last one truly enjoyed by fans. Although there were no immediate new mechanics that dramatically changed the way the game played, the experience of the Namco team refined what was there – side-steps were improved, the new clash system saw weapons bounce off each other, and Just Frame moves rewarded players who had perfect timing with their inputs.

"Back then, it was the first craze of 3D fighting games," says Tago, reflecting on the success of *SoulCalibur II*. "The perfection level of *SoulCalibur II* was very high, but I think that the friends and environment experienced during that period was something special to the fans."

> "SoulCalibur II was a further high point for the series and is often remembered as the best"

New characters were brought in, as expected. Cassandra, Talim, Yun-seong and Raphael were the new contenders, yet Namco also tried something far more ambitious than that for *SoulCalibur II*. For the first time in any fighting game, Namco introduced console-exclusive characters. PlayStation 2 owners saw *Tekken*'s Heihachi join as an extra, while GameCube owners could choose Link from *The Legend Of Zelda*. The Xbox didn't really have its own mascot – let's try to forget that *Blinx* ever happened – so Todd McFarlane's Spawn was the console's exclusive fighter. Incredibly, they all fit seamlessly alongside the existing cast, which is a big reason why they were so well-received.

"As far as I have been talking with the staff at the time, they sound satisfied," explains Tago about the implementation of the characters. "This is because *SoulCalibur II* was developed not only wishing for our satisfaction but the maximum satisfaction of the customers that own each console. The guest characters are taken in as the huge differences; we analysed the market along with the console's capabilities and achieved what we did on the technology side as well. The good example is that only the Xbox version has HD graphics."

SoulCalibur III followed in October 2005, but Namco had started to lose its way with the series. While critically praised, the sequel arrived at an awkward time. *Capcom vs SNK 2 EO*, *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* and *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* had nudged the genre into taking its first tentative steps online thanks to Xbox Live's growing stature, but *SoulCalibur III* stubbornly resisted the trend, remaining offline-only.

Furthermore, fighting games found their fan base dwindling in numbers. Hardcore fans kept supporting the genre, but they drifted towards the likes of *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* and *Tekken 5*, as the popularity of those games was kept buoyant by the rise of international tournaments such as Super Battle Opera in Japan and EVO in the United States. Those tournaments were held on arcade machines, meaning *SoulCalibur III*, which didn't have an arcade release until a year after it hit the PS2, found itself frozen out. Without a strong arcade presence, it wasn't supported at major tournaments and saw its profile dwindle.

Perhaps realising that a dramatic overhaul was needed, Namco Bandai, as it was by then known, decided to ring the changes for *SoulCalibur IV*, focusing all its efforts on capturing the console crowd. Armour could now be broken in different stages, with a Critical Finish move available to end the round altogether when the opponent's guard was broken. Online play was available,



» [360] Hwang has disappeared from the series, one of the few original characters not to carry through.

SOULCALIBUR: ENDGAME

The movie that never was…

◆ It was during spring 2001 when director Sammo Hung acquired the rights to produce a *SoulCalibur* movie. Not only would he have the experience of Hong Kong cinema behind him, but he also had support from Namco and a $50 million budget at his disposal. Hung had Jackie Chan in mind, fresh from the success of *Shanghai Noon* and *Rush Hour 2*, and even his own flirtation with games in *Jackie Chan Stuntmaster*. Unfortunately – or perhaps fortunately, given the reputation of videogame movies – that's as far as the idea got. Jackie Chan couldn't commit to a schedule and, without his star, Sammo Hung's interest in the project drifted. Hung forfeited his rights and an American producer took them off his hands. Since then, it's been nothing but the odd rumour, with the last possible sighting being a holding page in 2007, which has since been deleted.





the character creation mode was expanded, and Tower of Lost Souls added more single-player meat alongside the story mode.

Even so, it didn't escape criticism, and most of the ire was aimed at the guest characters. While *SoulCalibur II* had Link, Heihachi and Spawn – extra faces who slotted in alongside the *SoulCalibur* crowd without looking awkward – now we had Yoda, Darth Vader and Starkiller joining from *Star Wars*. It wasn't a comfortable fit, particularly in the case of Yoda, who couldn't be thrown, as he was so short.

"The guest characters in *SoulCalibur IV* had various difficulties in expressing within the game," *SoulCalibur* director Daishi Odashima admits. "For example, since they were not game characters – not taking the very famous scenes in movies into consideration – we needed to think of the motions almost from scratch. Reflecting on that experience, the guest character of *SoulCalibur V*, Ezio, was chosen from the aspect of having world view and gameplay that will match that of *SoulCalibur*."

While *SoulCalibur IV* sold well enough and enjoyed strong review scores, it didn't match the previous highs of the series. There were rumours that Project Soul would split up following *SoulCalibur IV*, and it was left to *Tekken* producer Katsuhiro Harada to try to drum up support for *SoulCalibur V* over Twitter, another show of the unity between the two fighting game series at Namco Bandai.

Again, Namco Bandai decided to bring in a host of changes, trying even more mechanics and pushing *SoulCalibur* further away from the game that shocked the world with its brawling back in 1996. Guard Impact had been a series trademark since *SoulCalibur*, but after leaving it alone for four outings, Namco completely overhauled the mechanic. Instead of entering the button command for a free Guard Impact attempt, with the only downside being that you were left vulnerable if you missed, it now cost meter to do as well. You don't have to guess the direction of the incoming attack; only that an attack is coming.

"Simply, Guard Impact is much stronger," points out Odashima. "Using the Critical Gauge means that without [meter], you can't do reverse impact either. It looks very simple, but with this, the insight during the battle is taken a step further. In addition, by narrowing down the four types of Guard Impact into one, the control itself is simplified. This is a result of aiming for an easy-to-understand control for newcomers."

That's not the only example of Namco Bandai's bravery. In a move that's rarely attempted by established fighting games, *SoulCalibur V* is ditching fan favourites Taki, Xianghua, Kilik, Cassandra and Sophitia in favour of new faces Natsu, Leixia, Xiba, Patroklos and Pyrrha. Those characters will use tweaked move sets that belong to the fan favourites, so it's not as though those who have learnt Taki over the years will have had

> "Tekken producer Katsuhiro Harada had to drum up support for SoulCalibur over Twitter"



» [Dreamcast] *SoulCalibur*'s Xianghua and Taki are now replaced by Leixia and Natsu for *SoulCalibur V*.

those hours wasted. Even so, it's a courageous move from a series that has spent over ten years establishing those characters.

"There were two thoughts," explains Odashima. "By making the characters anew, we wanted to show that this was a totally different *SoulCalibur*. We pushed the new aspect in order to have people that have not played *SoulCalibur* before want to try playing. The other is similar, but the gameplay using the old characters had simmered down with *IV*. We thought it wasn't something we should do with *SoulCalibur V*."

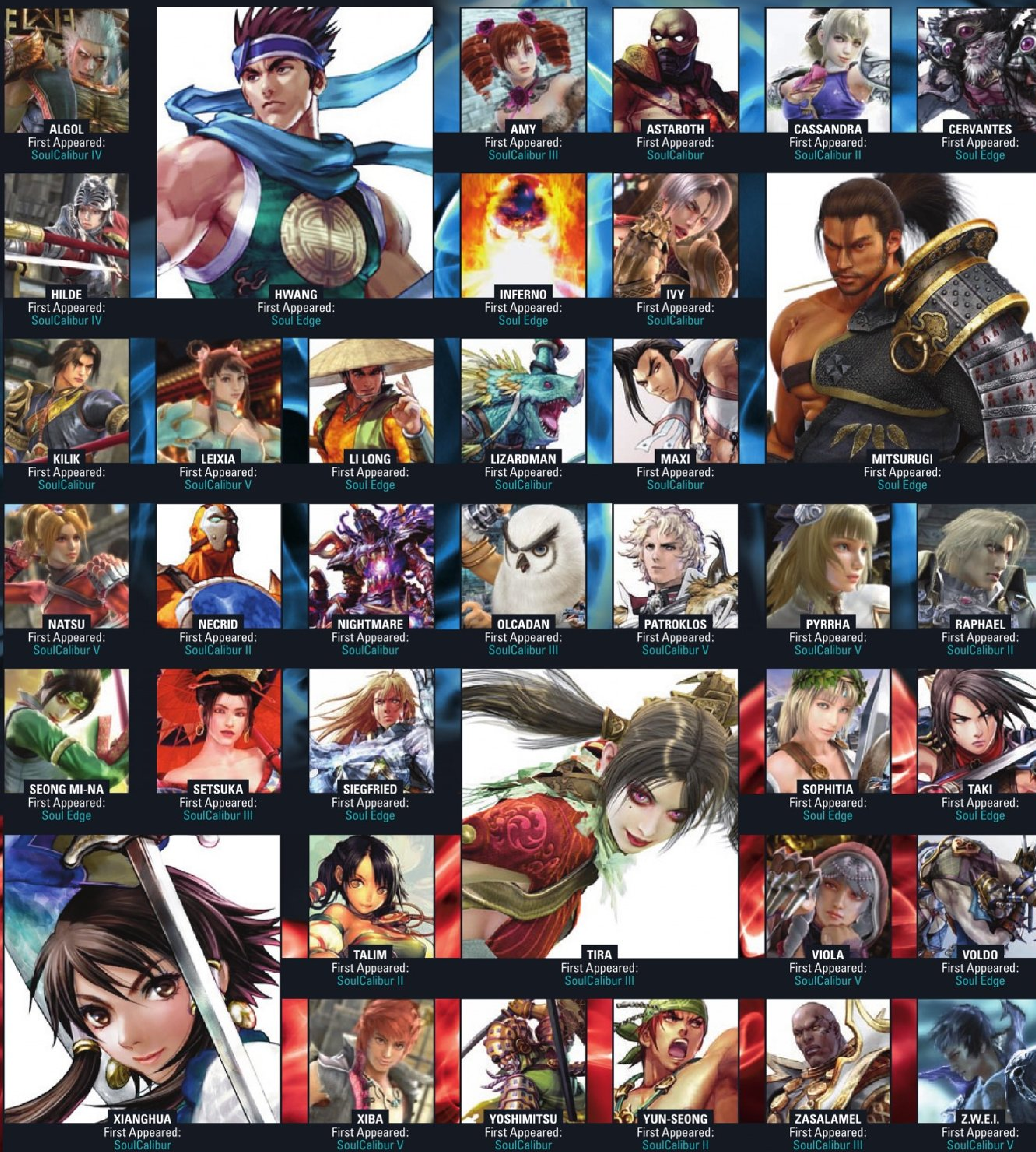
SoulCalibur V looks to have found its place in gaming again. Just as the series wowed a generation of Dreamcast owners, so its latest instalment has reinvented itself to stay current in this fighting renaissance. Looking back at previous games, "it's the fact that they were able to make use of the biggest characteristic of fighting with weapons, both in the gameplay and story," says Tago, explaining *SoulCalibur*'s success. Yet it was more than that. It was grace and elegance married to button-bashing and swearing. It was the vision to go where no other fighting game dared. It was, when all is said and done, the stage of history.

Special thanks to Namco's Peter Oliver for his help in creating this article.



STAGE OF HEROES

This group of brave souls has fought on the stage of history through six games now...



ALGOL
First Appeared: SoulCalibur IV

HWANG
First Appeared: Soul Edge

AMY
First Appeared: SoulCalibur III

ASTAROTH
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

CASSANDRA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur II

CERVANTES
First Appeared: Soul Edge

HILDE
First Appeared: SoulCalibur IV

INFERNO
First Appeared: Soul Edge

IVY
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

MITSURUGI
First Appeared: Soul Edge

KILIK
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

LEIXIA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur V

LI LONG
First Appeared: Soul Edge

LIZARDMAN
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

MAXI
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

NATSU
First Appeared: SoulCalibur V

NECRID
First Appeared: SoulCalibur II

NIGHTMARE
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

OLCADAN
First Appeared: SoulCalibur III

PATROKLOS
First Appeared: SoulCalibur V

PYRRHA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur V

RAPHAEL
First Appeared: SoulCalibur II

SEONG MI-NA
First Appeared: Soul Edge

SETSUKA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur III

SIEGFRIED
First Appeared: Soul Edge

SOPHITIA
First Appeared: Soul Edge

TAKI
First Appeared: Soul Edge

TALIM
First Appeared: SoulCalibur II

TIRA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur III

VIOLA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur V

VOLDO
First Appeared: Soul Edge

XIANGHUA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

XIBA
First Appeared: SoulCalibur V

YOSHIMITSU
First Appeared: SoulCalibur

YUN-SEONG
First Appeared: SoulCalibur II

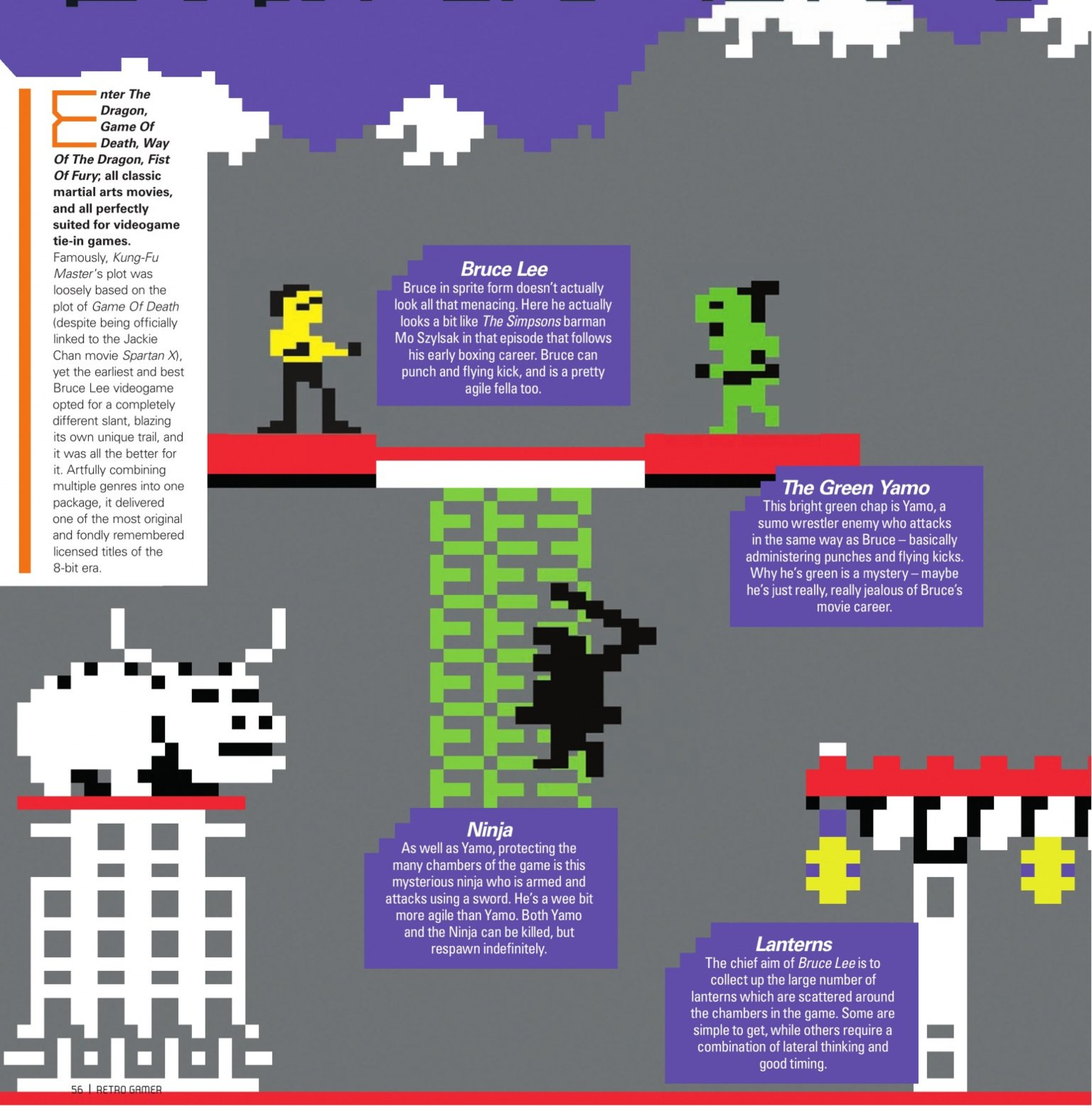
ZASALAMEL
First Appeared: SoulCalibur III

Z.W.E.I.
First Appeared: SoulCalibur V

THE CLASSIC GAME

BRUCE LEE

E*nter The Dragon, Game Of Death, Way Of The Dragon, Fist Of Fury*; all classic martial arts movies, and all perfectly suited for videogame tie-in games. Famously, *Kung-Fu Master*'s plot was loosely based on the plot of *Game Of Death* (despite being officially linked to the Jackie Chan movie *Spartan X*), yet the earliest and best Bruce Lee videogame opted for a completely different slant, blazing its own unique trail, and it was all the better for it. Artfully combining multiple genres into one package, it delivered one of the most original and fondly remembered licensed titles of the 8-bit era.



Bruce Lee

Bruce in sprite form doesn't actually look all that menacing. Here he actually looks a bit like *The Simpsons* barman Mo Szylsak in that episode that follows his early boxing career. Bruce can punch and flying kick, and is a pretty agile fella too.

The Green Yamo

This bright green chap is Yamo, a sumo wrestler enemy who attacks in the same way as Bruce – basically administering punches and flying kicks. Why he's green is a mystery – maybe he's just really, really jealous of Bruce's movie career.

Ninja

As well as Yamo, protecting the many chambers of the game is this mysterious ninja who is armed and attacks using a sword. He's a wee bit more agile than Yamo. Both Yamo and the Ninja can be killed, but respawn indefinitely.

Lanterns

The chief aim of *Bruce Lee* is to collect up the large number of lanterns which are scattered around the chambers in the game. Some are simple to get, while others require a combination of lateral thinking and good timing.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS



The thinking man's brawler

Some could argue that a Bruce Lee game that is a little light on combat is a baffling direction to take, but considering Bruce was as much a thinker and philosopher as he was dangerous, skilful and respected martial artist, the mix of puzzle/platformer and beat-'em-up gameplay feels, in hindsight, like a good fit for the legend. Combine this with some great level design, and a sense of humour coming from the two blundering enemies in the game, and *Bruce Lee* sets hardly a foot wrong. Our only real moan is that we wish there was more of it.



Friendly fists of fury

A great aspect of *Bruce Lee* was that it offered different modes to fool around with. Two players could take it in turns to assume the role of Bruce, working together to collect all the lanterns and defeat the nefarious Fire Wizard, or one person could assume the role of Bruce while another player got to play as The Green Yamo. Yamo controls and fights in the same way as Bruce, but pressing down on the controls causes him to bark rather than crouch. Rather nicely, if the player controlling Yamo gets bored or is struck down dead, the computer will note the inactivity and cleverly auto-assume control.



Stops you in its tracks

Bruce Lee isn't the most challenging game, but there are a couple of sticky chambers. By far the trickiest is this room, which contains four lanes of deadly electrified tracks for Bruce to get past. The white blocks you see will kill Bruce outright, and move pretty rapidly across the surface of the tracks. The aim, then, is to time your leaps to avoid them. Doing this once is pulse-quickening (not in a nice way), but four times in quick succession, with each track becoming more difficult than the last, is a pretty tall order. If you complete this chamber, though, the rest of the game should be a doddle.



Red wizard is about to die!

Reaching the final room and beating the game is obviously a fantastic moment. The final chamber is a boss fight, but not in the traditional sense. Like the Bowser battles in *Super Mario Bros.*, your goal isn't to hit the wizard but simply get past him. You must retrieve the final lantern situated at the far right of the screen while dodging the wizard's annoying projectiles. Snuff it out and he is defeated. In the subsequent screen, Bruce can be seen jumping for joy as he finds himself surrounded by gold and treasure – reward for slaying the wizard, or our hero back at home looking at all his movie money?



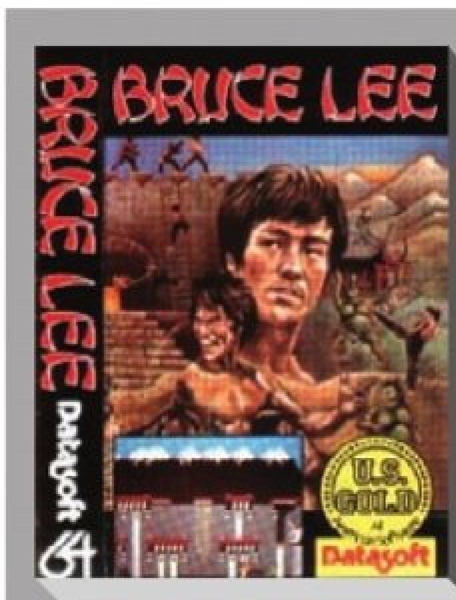
The green dude

While Bruce is the star, it's Yamo who steals the show, injecting a real sense of humour and charm to proceedings. It never gets tiring seeing Yamo chase our lightning-quick hero around, always lagging behind him and his more agile ninja mate. Because Yamo is so sluggish, he'll often mistakenly pummel the ninja or get in his way, much to the annoyance of his pal, who will angrily hit him back. With nice touches, such as Yamo humourlessly barking (or yawning?) when he arrives on the scene or holding down his skirt to keep his dignity when falling from platforms, loads of character is packed into this green guy.



Grand design

In spite of the fact *Bruce Lee* is a licenced/puzzle/platformer/beat-'em-up, what makes it so good is its simplicity. From the way it looks, to its gameplay and overall design, nothing feels overblown or flashy. It's just a unique and extremely replayable platformer; one that is perfectly suited to speed-running. The aim is to collect up all the lanterns dotted around each chamber to open up access to the next. As you do this (for the most part) you're hounded by two respawning enemies (sumo wrestler Yamo and a nameless ninja), and must safely negotiate various dangers and obstacles too.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** ATARI 8-BIT, MSX, C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC, BBC MICRO, DOS, APPLE-II
- **PUBLISHER:** DATASOFT INC, U.S. GOLD
- **DEVELOPER:** DATASOFT INC.
- **RELEASED:** 1983
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER/BEAT-'EM-UP

What the press said… ages ago



Zzap!64, 92%
"A classic platform game with unmissable, addictive action."
Issue 40

CRASH, 91%
"*Bruce Lee* is one of the best action-packed animated games on the market. The graphics are very detailed, lively and good-looking; they add a bit of zest to the game."
Issue 16

What we think

Bruce Lee isn't the largest or the most challenging game – there are only a couple of really tricky rooms to negotiate – but it has bags of charm, playability and character. It's a classic 8-bit platformer that leaves you wanting more.



TOP 25 AMSTRAD GAMES

After Readers revealed their favourite Commodore 64 and Spectrum games, we felt it only fair that the Amstrad received its own top 25. Join Darran Jones and Stuart Hunt as they reveal which titles you voted as the best games for Lord Alan Sugar's 8-bit wonder



Get Dexter

■ **DEVELOPER:** REMI HERBULOT
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE

25 **The saddest aspects** of *Get Dexter*'s inclusion in this top 25 are not only that it's charted so low, for such a wonderfully imaginative game, but also that it's one of just two 8-bit exclusive Amstrad titles in the entire list. What a game for everyone to pick, though. It still looks beautiful, thanks to its gorgeous vibrant visuals, while the slick controls, clever level design and interesting puzzles ensures that it stands tall in a very overcrowded genre.



Solomon's Key

■ **DEVELOPER:** PROBE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLER

24 ***Solomon's Key* is** a fabulous little platform puzzler from Tecmo, and this CPC port is a superb adaptation that looks and plays staggeringly close to its arcade parent. You play a Wizard named Dana who must traverse a series of monster-riddled chambers to secure King Solomon's treasure. To obtain the sovereign's life savings, Dana, using his block making/disappearing powers, must secure the key on each stage and use it to unlock the door that grants him access to the next stage. This is an impressive conversion of a real underappreciated gem.

Ikari Warriors

■ **DEVELOPER:** ELITE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

23 ***Ikari Warriors* was** the perfect after-school game to play with a chum, allowing you to brush homework aside to spend a late afternoon working together to escape from enemy lines and argue over tanks. This is a shining CPC effort thanks to colourful visuals that capture the look of the arcade game. It's not the smoothest of ports, but it's certainly the most faithful looking, preserving the multiplayer fun of the original and also making a fine fist of interpreting the original's rotary control scheme.



A.T.F.

■ **DEVELOPER:** DIGITAL INTEGRATION
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** SIMULATOR

22 **Unlike similar flight** simulator games of the time, *ATF* is more interested in letting you down enemy ships rather than wrestle with complex controls. It's a delightful payoff that makes it feel more like an old-school arcade game, with your Advanced Tactical Fighter zipping across the landscape, taking down enemies with ease. It's also exceptionally slick, thanks to its impressive visuals, which still manage to convey an excellent sensation of speed.



Driller

■ **DEVELOPER:** MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

21 ***Driller* might not** be the best game to utilise the then-innovative Freescape engine, but it's arguably the most important, and while *Total Eclipse* and *Castle Master* put up good fights, this was the game you all voted for as the best of the bunch too. *Driller* may be crushingly slow to play on a CPC today, but it remains a deceptively strategic game that still manages to suck you in to its sparse, but strangely beautiful world. Working out the best locations to place drill points so you can drain Mitral of its dangerous gas becomes extremely absorbing, while the continual countdown (you have four hours in real time) and sparse use of sound creates a very atmospheric adventure.





Fantasy World Dizzy

■ **DEVELOPER:** CODEMASTERS
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** ADVENTURE PLATFORMER

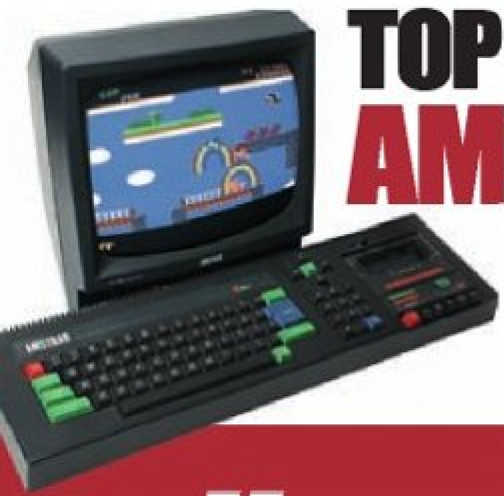
20 **Considering *Dizzy* was** hatched on a CPC, he had to appear on this list, and we weren't at all surprised to discover that it was *Fantasy World* that received the most number of votes. Widely regarded to be the best episode in the venerable series, it introduced a number of ideas and elements that proved popular with many fans and became series staples, including extra lives, a better inventory system and Dizzy's extended family, the Yolkfolk.

Exolon

■ **DEVELOPER:** RAFFAELLE CECCO
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

19 **Raffelle Cecco was** a genius when it came to pushing the Spectrum and Amstrad to their limits, and *Exolon* was no exception. Cecco's space romp sees you stomping through searingly bright locations that feature dangerous gun emplacements, immobile objects and huge numbers of enemies. Fortunately, while your space marine is rather slow, he's loaded down with grenades and bullets that more than even the battle, and make *Exolon* as exciting to play as it is colourful. A truly excellent shooter, which was remade for Windows in 2005.





TOP 25 AMSTRAD GAMES

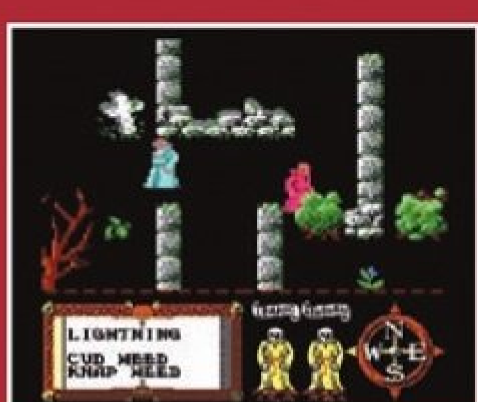
Honourable Mentions

There are plenty of classic Amstrad games that didn't make your list. Here are the omissions we were most surprised by...

Feud

- **DEVELOPER:** THE PICKFORD BROTHERS
- **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** SPELL-'EM-UP

An excellent original idea from the Pickfords: a wizard battles his evil brother, by using herbs to concoct deadly spells. Unfortunately, your brother is doing exactly the same thing, so *Feud* becomes a game of cat and mouse, with both of you doing your best to create the best spells and reduce your opponent to ash.





Cybernoid

- **DEVELOPER:** RAFFAELE CECCO
- **YEAR RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Raffaele Cecco was something of a darling on the Amstrad, thanks to a number of excellent games. *Cybernoid* is a fantastic shooter that combines gorgeous visuals with a killer soundtrack to great effect. Most impressive, however, is how it effortlessly blends genres, mixing frantic shooting with the pixel-perfect finesse of popular platformers.

Inside Outing

- **DEVELOPER:** THE EDGE
- **YEAR RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE

Known as *Raffles* on 16-bit machines, *Inside Outing* was an excellent adventure that saw you play a thief hired by a widow to find her late husband's diamonds. It's a masterfully crafted game, both in terms of its clever level structure and deviously designed puzzles. Best of all though, the Amstrad version looks amazing compared to its 8-bit peers.





Aliens

- **DEVELOPER:** SOFTWARE STUDIOS
- **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** ACTION/STRATEGY

Few CPC games delivered the chilling atmosphere of *Aliens*, an unsettling action/strategy game that sees players command a squad of colonial marines through a deadly labyrinth of over 200 rooms swarming with the lethal Xenomorph. Sure it's essentially a re-themed *3D Monster Maze*, but its brilliance is the way it successfully captures the look and tone of the movie.

Donkey Kong

- **DEVELOPER:** IKEGAMI TSUSHINKI, NINTENDO
- **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986
- **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

This is a superb conversion that we were shocked didn't chart. It's a fantastic facsimile, with all the levels and main players looking amazingly true to their arcade counterparts. What's most impressive about this port though, is that it features all four stages – something Nintendo's NES port couldn't even muster.





Lemmings

- **DEVELOPER:** PSYGNOSIS ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1992
- **GENRE:** PUZZLER

18 **That *Lemmings* holds** the honour of being one of the two highest scoring games in *Amstrad Action* with 97% (sharing that honour with *Rick Dangerous II*) should tell you all you need to know about the quality of this conversion. The overall design and ant-farm look of the Amiga classic suited the CPC, and though this version only had 60 levels (half the amount of the original), the visuals and gameplay were relocated brilliantly. At a time when many gamers were starting to enjoy 16-bit floppy disc fed powerhouses and Japanese games consoles, late CPC offerings such as *Lemmings* proved that this 8-bit micro wasn't ready for the scrapheap quite just yet.

Turrican

- **DEVELOPER:** PROBE SOFTWARE ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990
- **GENRE:** PUZZLE

17 **Probe did a** fantastic job of converting Manfred Trenz's stunning and successful C64 run-and-gun game to the CPC. Sharing a number of similarities with the NES classic *Metroid*, players could explore vast, lush-looking levels and blast away all manner of unsavoury alien nasties with an impressive number of different weapons. Sounds awesome right? Sadly there was no music in this port, but hey, at least it looked really, really pretty.

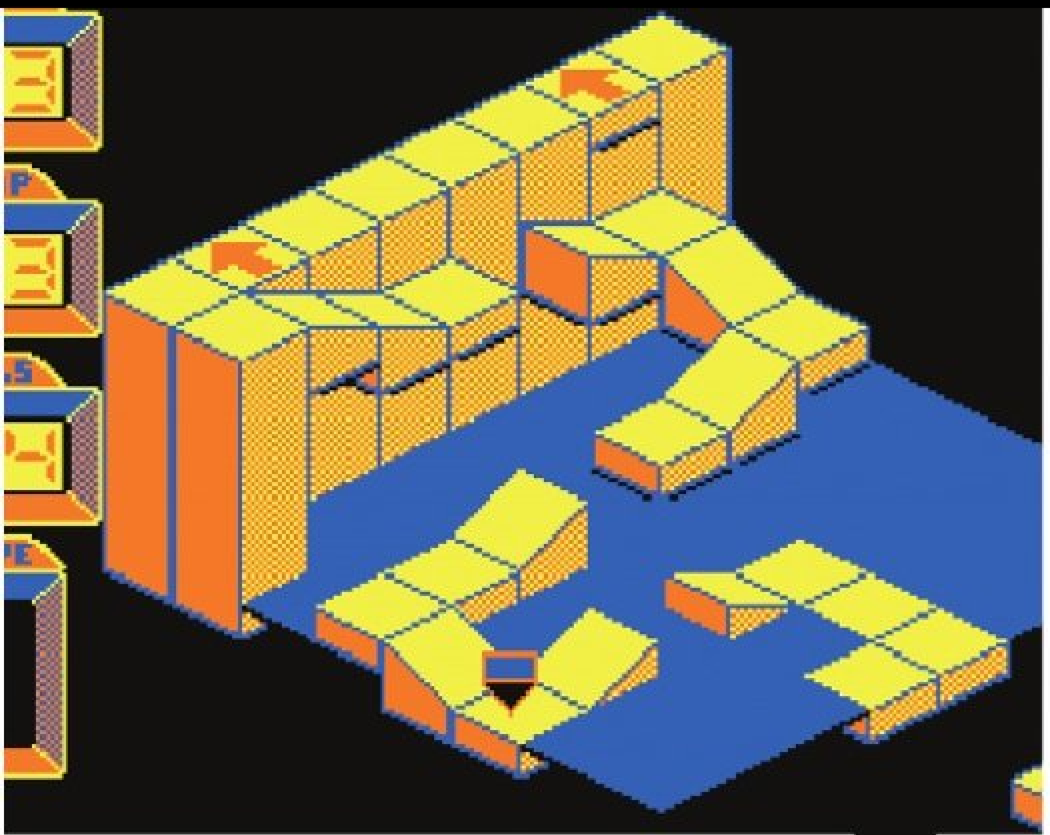




Renegade

- **DEVELOPER:** IMAGINE ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

16 **It's simply the** finest side-scrolling beat-'em-up series on the CPC. Two of the three games that make up the *Renegade* trilogy effortlessly made it onto this list; the last episode, *Renegade III: The Final Chapter*, was banned from coming within a million miles of it. A fab port of the Technos' classic, which marked the first game in its *Kunio-Kin* series, *Renegade* is a fine game, with some great tunes, lovely, chunky, arcadey visuals, an impressive number of enemy sprites on-screen, and plenty of moves thanks to an initially awkward but actually quite brilliant cursor key/joystick control scheme.



Spindizzy

■ **DEVELOPER:** PAUL SHIRLEY
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** PUZZLE/PLATFORMER

15 **Paul Shirley's sublime** puzzler walked away with a deserved *Amstrad Action* 'Mastergame' award in 1986. 26 years later, it's still a peerless isometric puzzler that will test both your brains and your dexterity. The surrealist 386-screen world is filled with switches, lifts, dangerous hazards and mind-bending puzzles that need to be overcome by your physics-assisted drone if you wish to retrieve the 200 gems that are scattered throughout the bizarre landscape. A magnificent puzzle game.

Gauntlet

■ **DEVELOPER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** ACTION

14 **There are some** cracking arcade conversions available on the Amstrad, and *Gauntlet* is no exception. Coded by Gremlin Graphics, it only supports two players, but does manage to convey all the excitement and danger of the original arcade game. It's technically very good as well, with decent scrolling (for the Amstrad), and a lot of fast-moving sprites. It does include a multiload, but it always loads in plenty of dungeons, meaning you're rarely waiting around for long. A great adaptation of the classic arcade game.



Bomb Jack

■ **DEVELOPER:** ELITE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

13 **This is another** arcade conversion where the Spectrum and CPC ports greatly outshone their C64 counterpart. While we have to attest that the Speccy port just pips it for best version, the CPC version is still a superb offering thanks to its vibrant visuals, nice sound effects and exceptionally smooth scrolling, even if Bomb Jack himself looks like a bit like a cross between Gort and Mr. Incredible.





Rainbow Islands

■ **DEVELOPER:** GRAFTGOLD
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

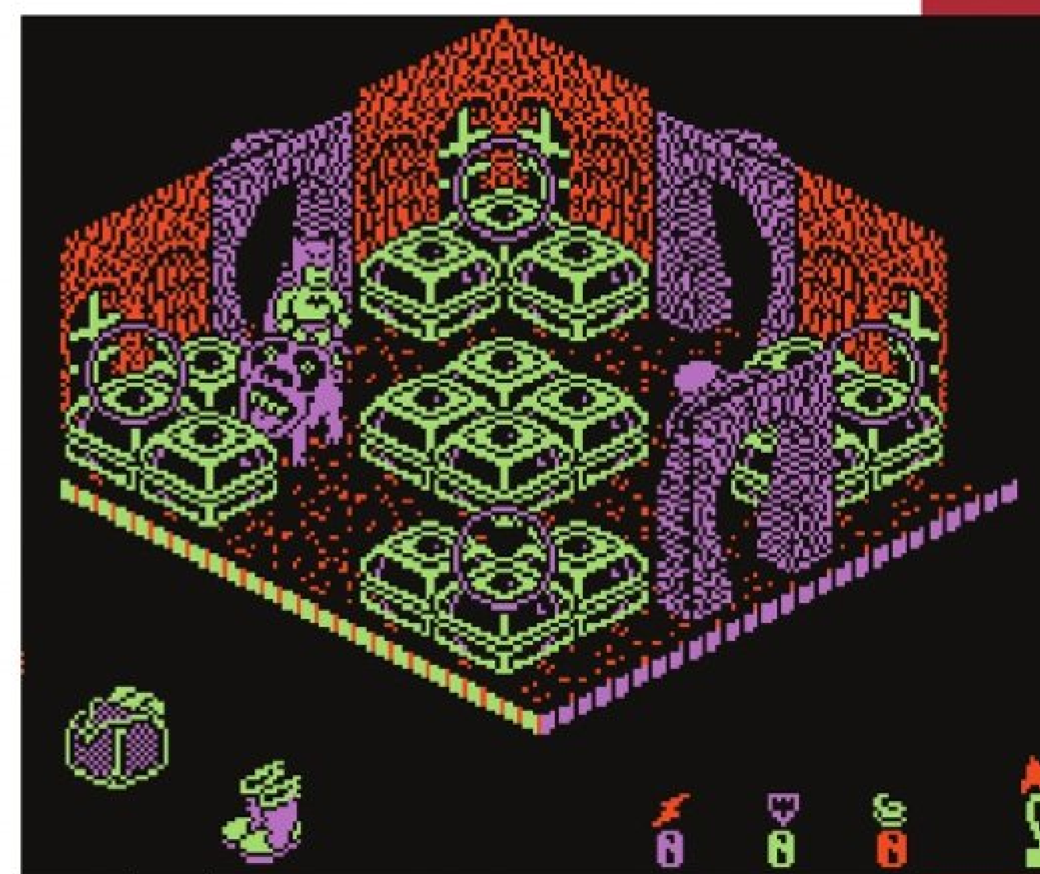
12 **Graftgold didn't make** many arcade conversions, but the ones they did take on were often outstanding. By far their best effort was *Rainbow Islands*, a stunning conversion that, while not fully complete – secret islands are missing – is nevertheless an impressive achievement. All the 8- and 16-bit conversions were of a high standard, and the same can be said for the Amstrad offering, which features bright colourful visuals, and a bouncy rendition of the original arcade theme tune, courtesy of Graftgold founder Steve Turner. Our only surprise is that it hasn't made your top ten.



Barbarian: The Ultimate Warrior

■ **DEVELOPER:** PALACE SOFTWARE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

11 **Wolf from *Gladiators*** sporting a nappy, UGG boots and bad hair, Maria Whittaker hugging his leg… classic box art and a classic game. *Barbarian* can be seen as the *Bushido Blade* of its day, as you could kill or be killed in a single move – a spinning decapitation hack. With fantastic visuals, emotive *Conan*-style music, and simple, effective combat, it became timeless brawler, and there's little separating the equally fab C64 and CPC ports.



Batman

■ **DEVELOPER:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1986 ■ **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE

10 **To the best** of our knowledge this is the first officially licensed *Batman* game, and it's a pretty good – so good, in fact, that Ocean released two additional games on the CPC. Robin has been captured and Bats must assemble the seven parts of his Batmobile so he can rescue his ward. Before this though, Batman needs to secure four additional items that will make his task far easier to complete. Although heavily influenced by Ultimate's *Knight Lore*, *Batman* still manages to stand on its own two feet and set the groundwork for another Ritman/Drummond game that features in your list.

Batman: The Movie

■ **DEVELOPER:** OCEAN SOFTWARE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** LICENSED VIDEOGAME

9 ***Batman: The Movie*** is another fantastic film-to-videogame adaptation from Ocean. By reusing the mini-game template that had served *RoboCop* so well the year before, it was another great interactive rendition of a movie from the Mancunian publisher. From a side-scrolling Batarang-'em-up stage that saw Bats chase down Jack Napier to a challenging driving section that saw players tearing through the streets of Gotham City in the Batmobile, relying on a hook shot to quickly round corners, *Batman: The Movie* looked, sounded and above all played the part, providing perfect wish fulfilment for both fans of the film and the tortured hero himself.





TOP 25 AMSTRAD GAMES



Prince Of Persia

■ **DEVELOPER:** MICROIDS
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

8 **This was the** only official 8-bit port of Jordan Mechner's masterpiece (the Spectrum version arrived six years later, while a C64 conversion has only just been released). It's a belter, though, playing to the CPC's strengths and delivering a fantastic conversion as polished as the Apple II original. Animation is exemplary, while the fight scenes are a joy to watch. It's also blessed with responsive controls, ensuring that you never mess up one of the Prince's many jumps.

Switchblade

■ **DEVELOPER:** GREMLIN INTERACTIVE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1990 ■ **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

7 **While at a** glance *Switchblade* appears to be a lazy Spectrum port, owing to its monochrome visuals, it's actually a stunning port boasting astonishingly detailed sprites courtesy of the CPC's Mode 1 resolution mode (which explains the lack of colour). Compared to the C64 port, in which enemies are a blocky mess and hero Hiro looks like a sunburnt Lego man, and the Spectrum port which has grey-and-black visuals that make it difficult to distinguish sprites against the background, this is the best 8-bit port, only bested by the enhanced Amstrad Plus/GX4000 version.



Sorcery+

■ **DEVELOPER:** THE GANG OF FIVE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1985 ■ **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

6 ***Sorcery* gained plenty** of fans on the CPC thanks to its excellent visuals and finely tuned gameplay. Taking control of a sorcerer, you travel around the flick-screen world and rescue wizards that have been sealed away by an evil necromancer. Items must be picked up and then used to access new areas, while the riddles you have to solve are of a very high standard. It also stands tall as one of the few Amstrad exclusives that could make Spectrum and C64 friends jealous.

Gryzor

■ **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI / OCEAN
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** RUN-AND-GUN

5 ***Gryzor*, or *Contra***, as it became more widely known, was skilfully ported down to the CPC. Though the scrolling could be smoother (it's flick screen), and lack of two-player co-op mode is disappointing, both aspects were forgiven when you cast eyes on its graphics. Expertly created by coder John Brandwood and artist Mark Jones, this is the best of the 8-bit ports. It's a tough version though (you can't drop and shoot and your rate of fire is slow) but finishing it does at least reward you with a bizarre ending unique to the CPC.









Head Over Heels

■ **DEVELOPER:** JON RITMAN/BERNIE DRUMMOND
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1987 ■ **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE

4 The genius of *Head Over Heels* remains the unique way in which you controlled its two distinctive spies, Head and Heels. Initially separated, they have their own individual skills, which can be combined once they are finally reunited. Full of surreal imagery thanks to Bernie Drummond's sublime pixel work, and sporting terrific puzzles and game design, it remains one of the best isometric adventures around and deserves its spot in your top five.

RoboCop

■ **DEVELOPER:** OCEAN
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** LICENSED GAME

3 **Is it the** most significant 8-bit movie-licensed videogame ever? We'd argue yes, as it strengthened gaming's relationship with the motion picture industry, laid the groundwork for Ocean Software becoming the biggest British publisher of the Eighties and Nineties, and was one the best and most iconic and successful licensed games of its time. The CPC was blessed with a fantastic version. It featured one of the greatest CPC soundtracks ever written, its visuals nailed the gritty, glum tone of the film, and the level design and gameplay stuck to the script brilliantly.

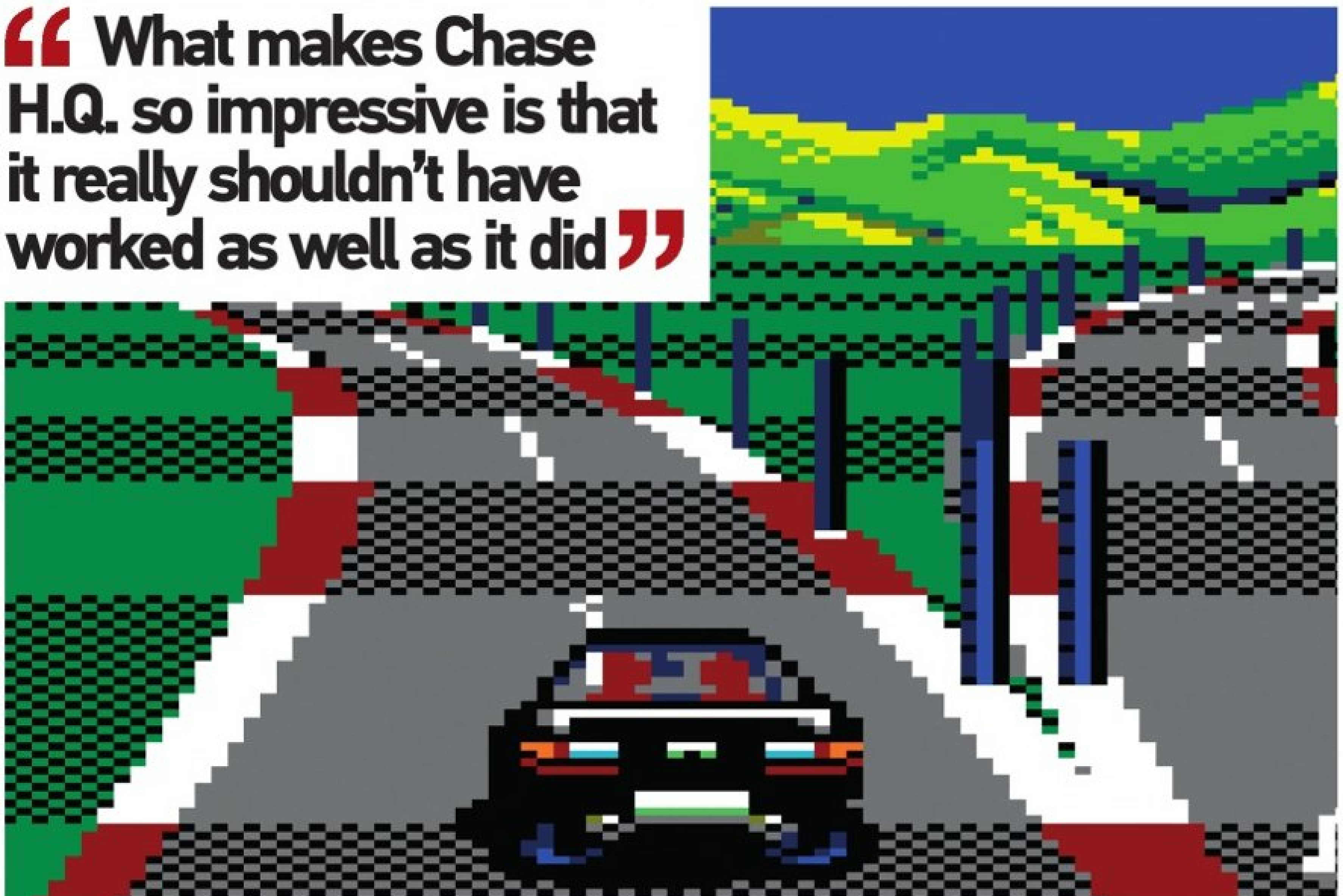


Target: Renegade

■ **DEVELOPER:** IMAGINE SOFTWARE
■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1988 ■ **GENRE:** SCROLLING FIGHTER

2 **We've always preferred** the Amstrad version of Imagine's excellent scrolling fighter, so it's pleasing to see *Target: Renegade* chart so highly. Created by Imagine from scratch when they wanted to follow up the success of the original, *Target: Renegade* is an amazing scrolling fighter that was the closest the Amstrad ever came to replicating arcade greats like *Double Dragon* and *Final Fight* (which were ported, but not up to the same standard). Filled with a typical English humour and featuring a large variety of enemies to fight and weapons to wield, it's an excellent fighter that plays as brilliantly today as it did in 1988.

> "What makes Chase H.Q. so impressive is that it really shouldn't have worked as well as it did"



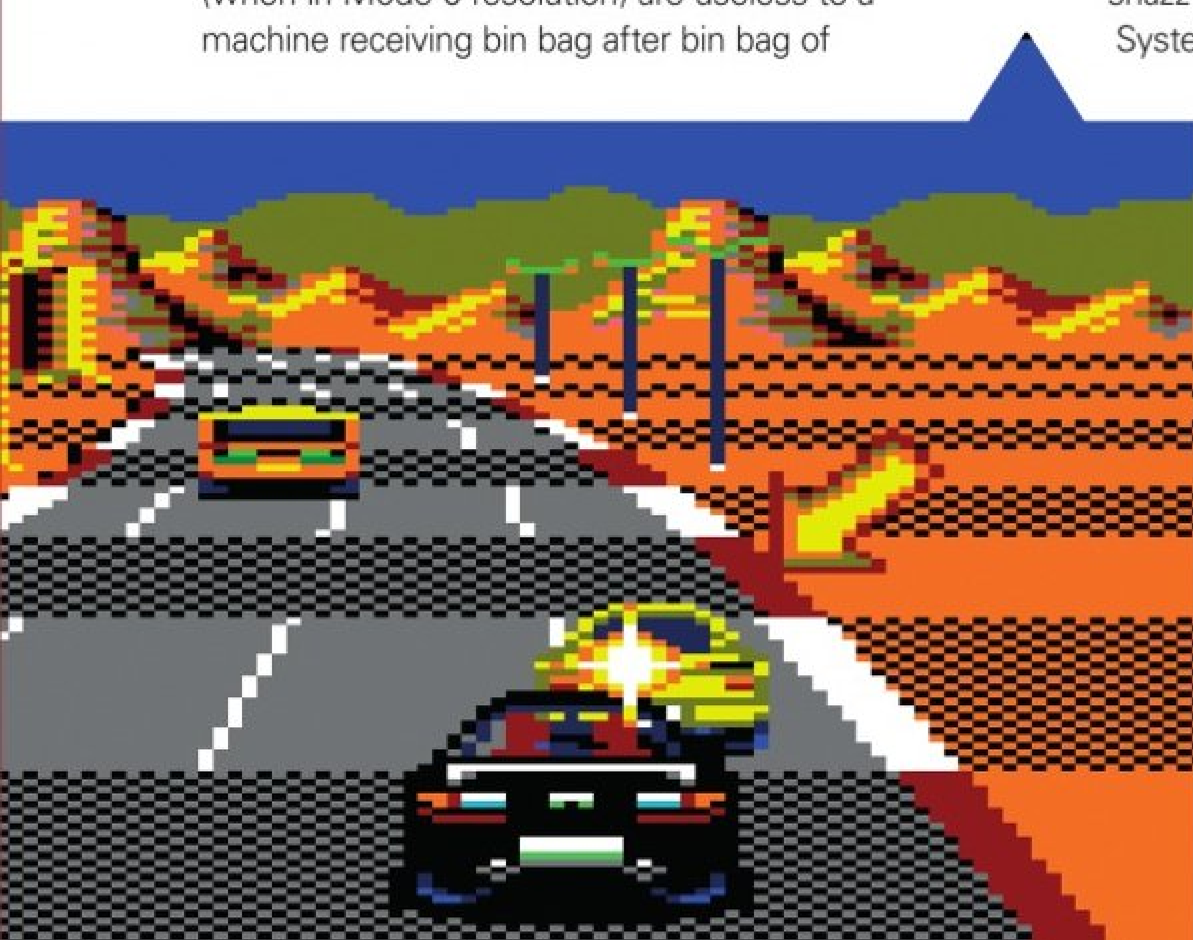
Chase H.Q.

■ **DEVELOPER:** TAITO / OCEAN ■ **YEAR RELEASED:** 1989 ■ **GENRE:** RACING

1 **Looking back at** this list it becomes clear that there is one area where the Amstrad shone. Coin-op conversions make up almost half the number of games in this feature, while exclusive titles make up just two. If you consider the law of averages then it came as little surprise that **RG** readers voted an arcade port as the very best game ever created for Lord Sugar's awesome machine.

More now than back in the playground (given the amount of stick the machine receives on our forum), CPC owners have to endure C64-owning pals calling their machine inferior, while ZX Spectrum owners stick the boot in by pointing out that a high number of lazy Speccy ports made up a large constituent of its software library, cleverly commenting that 16 colours (when in Mode 0 resolution) are useless to a machine receiving bin bag after bin bag of monochrome hand-me-downs. But in moments such as these, you can always walk over to your games collection, pull out your trusty copy of *Chase H.Q.* and know that there is a game that really shows off the potential of your beloved 8-bit underdog.

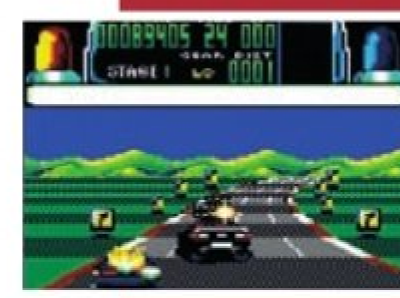
What makes *Chase H.Q.* such an impressive CPC conversion is that on paper it really shouldn't have worked as well as it did. Though Probe Entertainment had done CPC owners proud with other coin-op conversions, its dismal port of Sega's *OutRun* showed the horrible results of what happened when a sprite-scaling arcade racer was badly ported to their machine, and *Chase H.Q* – essentially *OutRun* with boss fights – was one of the most technically and graphically striking arcade racers of its time. Heck, even pricey, snazzy consoles such as the Nintendo Entertainment System and Sega Master System failed to deliver faithful conversions. But duplicated on this unassuming little CPC cassette tape was a near-flawless port, which still to this day remains quite simply mind-blowing.



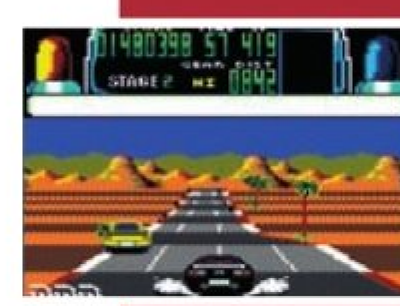
Programmed by John O' Brien and with fantastic graphics drawn by Bill Harbison, the CPC version looked, played, and if you were playing with 128K and could enjoy some digitised speech, sounded incredible.

While the ZX Spectrum version can also be deemed a stunning example of arcade miniaturisation (ranking #1 in *Your Sinclair* readers' Top 100 Games Of All Time), it is still outshone by this colourful and superior CPC port. The second the game loaded and the mission screen flashed up, you knew immediately you were in for a treat. Stunning to look at, incredibly fast and enormous fun, *Chase H.Q.* is criminally good, and here are five reasons why we love it so.

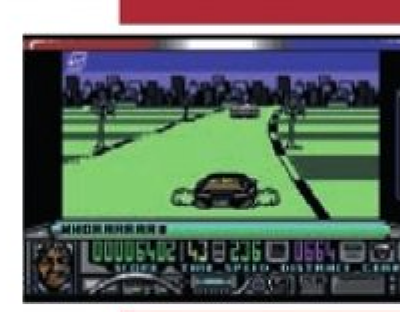
Five reasons why we love Chase H.Q.



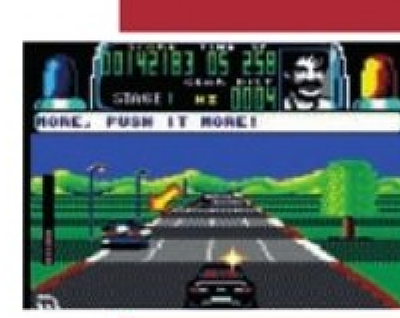
1 It looks great
Chase H.Q. is a wonderful showcase for the graphical ability of the Amstrad CPC. This conversion's crisp and vibrant graphics perfectly captured the look of the coin-op. And although their beauty didn't quite stretch to full-screen, the top border was a fine addition, featuring wailing sirens and a codec that streamed a video of your partner's delight/dismay at your driving.



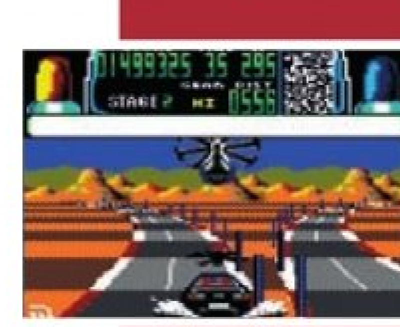
2 It's really fast
It goes without saying that a racing game needs to feel fast. A plodding arcade racer is the equivalent of a shoot-'em-up without any targets. This port does an outstanding job of capturing the thrills of the original, and that's before you've use a nitro and it feels like you've just injected computer steroids into the CPC's 'Enter' key.



3 The C64 port is dire
Yes this is arguably petty, but for some CPC owners just the fact that the Commodore 64 version of *Chase H.Q.* was one of the most disastrous arcade conversions ever created made their port all the more better. In terms of quality, the two versions couldn't be further apart.



4 Chat H.Q.
If there is one area where the CPC version of *Chase H.Q.* drops the ball it's the sound. It's not terrible (though it does sound a bit squitty); it just doesn't match up to the brilliance of other areas. Play it with 128K though and it's a whole different story – you get some superb digitised speech that completes the package nicely.



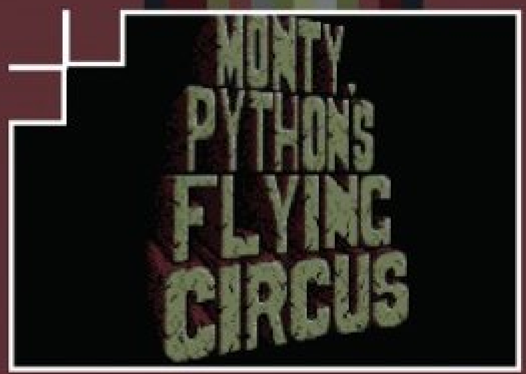
5 The complete package
Given the limitations of the humble CPC, you would have expected Ocean to have released a cut-back version of the arcade original. Not so – every stage and every fleeing criminal (albeit now driving slightly different cars) made it into this impressively faithful port.

THE MAKING OF



Monty Python's Flying Circus

Dead parrots, silly walks and bonus un-points for consuming canned meat, it can only mean one thing: the circus is in town. Simon Phipps explains to Stuart Hunt the challenges of turning classic surreal comedy into interactive entertainment



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** VIRGIN GAMES
- » **DEVELOPER:** CORE DESIGN LTD
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **PLATFORM:** PC, AMIGA, ST, CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM/SHOOTER

'All that kept going around in my mind was 'HOW THE HECK ARE WE GOING TO MAKE A GAME OUT OF THIS?' remembers Simon Phipps about the moment he was handed a *Python* to look after.

Creating a faithful game adaptation is a challenge, but creating one based on a TV show, particularly one as surreal, chaotic and sacred as *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, is surely a whole new level of dilemma for a developer.

Aside from the head-spinning decision about which of the many memorable *Python* sketches to hang a game on, there's the added fact that videogames famously struggle when it comes to humour. Consequently, a videogame adaptation of what many regard the best alternative comedy television show of all time was destined to fall short of a few expectations.

Through its surrealist humour, the reverences it paid to classic *Python* sketches, and Simon Phipps' faithful emulation of Terry Gilliam's trademark artwork style and caricatures of classic *Python* characters, for many fans *Monty Python's Flying Circus* was a fine tribute to the cult television show. For Simon, it was a passion project, despite the fact that at one stage it was competing with his dream one.

"The thing I remember was my boss at the time, Jeremy Heath-Smith, chatting to me one afternoon and telling me that he'd been talking to Virgin Games about making a



game for them, and he was very pleased to say that there were two licences that they were considering for us – *Judge Dredd* and *Monty Python's Flying Circus*.

"I went home that evening, rather excited, keeping my fingers crossed tightly for *Dredd* – I started reading the comics when they first appeared in '77-78, and was a huge fan of Brian Bolland, Ron Smith and Mike McMahon's *Dredd,* so the idea of spending several months in Mega City One was a dream come true.

"So, imagine my surprise when a number of weeks later we were proudly told that we'd got the *Python* title! I was gutted… for about five minutes… and then got on with the job."

As Simon notes though, looking back, it made sense for Core to be given the *Python* property to work with. The developer had just seen success with *Rick Dangerous*, and its cartoon visuals and goofy humour were both ingredients that could easily work in a *Python* videogame.

Simon admits he grew up on a telly diet of *Python*'s spiritual successors, shows such as *Not The Nine O'Clock News* and *The Young Ones*, but caught up on many of the classic *Python* shows through reruns. A budding artist, Simon was naturally drawn to the show by Terry Gilliam's colourful cut-out animations, and can vividly recall the first time he sat down, pencil and craft scissors in hands, and tried replicating his work.

"I can remember very clearly being seven years old in 1974 and watching a BBC1 morning programme called *The Bob Godfrey Do-It-Yourself-Film Animation Show,* which was a TV show about making your own movies aimed at kids," remembers Simon. "And they had an episode with Terry Gilliam explaining how he did all of the animations for the *Python* shows. It blew my mind, and I spent many hours making cut-out characters – and drawing around the edges of them with a black marker so that they had a nice, neat edge, as Mr Gilliam had showed us on TV – and putting them in scenes that I'd drawn. I had to wait until I hit 16 and got my BBC Microcomputer to finally get the chance to draw characters and animate them.

When Core learnt that it was *Python* it would be adapting into a videogame, the first thing the team did was to go through the entire back-catalogue of *Python* shows to gather ideas for a game concept, noting down key scenes and sketches and taking photographs of Gilliam's cartoon segments.

"The thing that occurred to us was that there were three ways to

> "When we were told we'd got the Python title, I was gutted. . . for about five minutes. . . and then got on with the job"

LOKS CHEESY

CORE WENT TO great pains to embrace the look, randomness and lunacy of the show, even injecting *Python* wackiness away from the gameplay. Two memorable examples of this were the game's barmy backwards scoring system and Cheeselok piracy protection measure. Simon explains how these two ideas were conceived.

"Well, the reverse scoring was an idea that came from the guys at Virgin. It was utterly bonkers and they really insisted on having it in. Conventional wisdom says that we all understand how to interpret scores going up and can easily tell the difference between them, but counting downwards from 99,999,999 is practically impossible to do – you can't tell what's a good score or a bad one.

As for Cheeselok, well, we were in the era of Manual Protection Systems. We'd been asked to implement one of those systems, so riffing off 'Lenslok' and taking inspiration from the Cheese Shop sketch we built Cheeselok, in which to play the game you have to identify cheeses based on illustrations of them that were hidden in the manual."



THE MAKING OF

build a *Python* game," explained Simon, "a massive graphic adventure (like LucasArts' *The Secret Of Monkey Island*), but that would only ever work on the Atari and Amiga with their huge disk drives and memory – we had to build something that would also work on tape on a Spectrum. The second way would be to build a massive stack of mini-games, but our budget and tiny team just wouldn't allow that. The final way was to build an action game using all of the knowledge and experience we'd gained on our previous titles. So, working with the guys at Virgin Games, we agreed an approach to guarantee that we could make a game that would work on six different formats, using a team of five of us, in the shortest amount of time possible."

With a team of five making the game across six platforms, and time short, the project became "intense". Simon created all the graphics across all the formats, including hand-scripting all the animations, and coding the map editors as well as the graphics cutting tools, while Dave Pridmore programmed the Amstrad and Spectrum versions and composed the music. Meanwhile, Chris Long was assigned to take care of the Commodore 64, while John Kirkland nurtured the PC version. Finally, Bob Churchill completed the troupe, helping out with various design tasks.

In terms of creative direction, the team received no input from the Pythons. "I don't even know whether any of them ever knew we'd made a game based on their work," muses Simon. However, Virgin Games worked closely with the team to come up with ideas on how best to turn the show into a game, though Simon remembers this process as a bit like "trying to pin jelly to a wall".

"You know in theory it should be possible, and everyone's got tons of suggestions on how to do it, but every time you try it… Well, that and the fact that pretty much every meeting we had would drift into recitals of any one of about 40 memorable *Python* sketches – what's that line from the *Not The Nine O'Clock News* skit on the reception that *Life Of Brian* had at the cinema? Ummm… 'When two or three are gathered together, they shall perform the Parrot Sketch.' And of course everyone had an absolute favourite sketch/character/line that simply had to feature, and we tried our very best to get them all in somehow. In the end, I think I finally worked out that we'd referenced over 100 different *Python* sketches in the game (I remember keeping a list to verify that)."

There was one instruction that came down from on high like the foot of cupid, though: Virgin didn't want *Rick Dangerous*.

"Looking back now, I understand what they meant – they didn't want us literally repainting *Rick* with *Python* characters. We would've never done that (and we didn't), but that did push us a little further from the mark than perhaps we should have gone, so we deliberately tried to make something that didn't rely on the kinds of traps and things that we'd done with *Rick*. Instead, we focused on making something where mastering the control of the central character would get us more of the gameplay."

Thankfully, a game concept finally did appear, courtesy of one recurring *Python* character. Simon explains that a Gumby was selected to play the lead in the game as it was the only *Python* character played by all six members of the comedy troupe. The loud, dim, bespectacled, hankie-and-welly-boot-wearing creation thus became a fittingly silly cornerstone for the game.

> It was a lesson in making sure that when you start work on a game you've got to have a good idea of where you're trying to get to



LOST IN ADAPTATION

SIMON REVEALED TO us that there are over 100 *Python* references in the game – he knows as he kept a list of them all. You'd therefore be forgiven for assuming that every homage/character/idea thought up by the team had made it into the finished game. Well, actually, you'd be wrong.

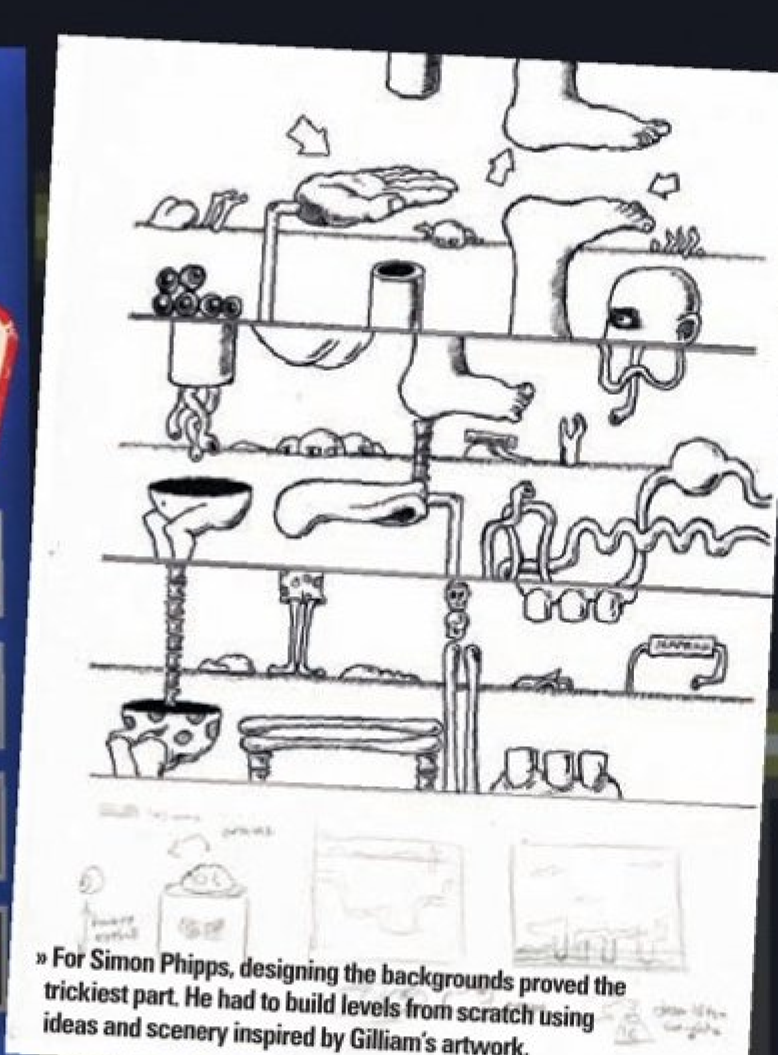
"There were a few - Chairman Mao as a fish, Eric Idle's Nudge Nudge character…" reveals Simon. "I did an illustration of a self-defence instructor holding a banana that didn't make it – there's a sketch in which the Pythons attend a self-defence class to find out that they have to learn to cope with attackers brandishing a handful of loganberries rather than 'a pointed stick'. But most of the stuff, once we'd figured out what the game was, went in.

One of the things that we added quite late were the random interruptions using the animation system. It was an idea that the guys at Virgin came up with: 'What if you were playing a level and then suddenly it stopped and cut away to an irrelevant animation?' – just like the show. That allowed us to get things like 'How to identify trees from quite a long way away' in or advertisements for North Malden ('Enjoy North Malden's fabulous night life! At the Frog and Marsupial tonite: Ken Buddah and his Inflatable Knees')."



» The game features many familiar *Python* characters, most of which only receive a small cameo.





» For Simon Phipps, designing the backgrounds proved the trickiest part. He had to build levels from scratch using ideas and scenery inspired by Gilliam's artwork.

Taking further inspiration from the Gumby Brain Specialist sketch, the character's 'my brain hurts!' catchphrase, and Gilliam's animations, the team thought up a scenario that saw Gumby lose his brain in the middle of surgery and the player having to help him retrieve it piece by piece. This then led to the idea of sticking Gumby's head on a variety of different bodies, and each having a different control system for the player to learn and master. This assured the team that *Python* would certainly feel different to *Rick Dangerous*. But after working up the concept, they weren't entirely happy with the result.

"As we discovered, just putting in difficult-to-master controls for Gumby didn't add up to much fun gameplay," explains Simon. "We were used to creating intricate levels with loads of traps, surprises and exploration, and we spent a lot of time trying to make the game hold up without using all of the techniques that were familiar to us. In fact, we spent an awful lot of time on that and, no matter what we did, the game still felt pretty thin."

After many weeks into its development, Virgin eventually did a U-turn and asked the team to include some *Rick Dangerous*-style trap gameplay in the game.

"That was all we needed to hear," says Simon. "We ripped out all the levels we'd made and took a different approach, and then over a four-week period, which was a long time back in those days, redesigned, rebuilt, retriggered and re-scripted all the levels – one per week, including all of the incidental animations, until we got the game nailed.

"We did manage to squeeze in some time for at least one mini-game in the end. We built an Argument Sketch mini-game in which you had to 'win' an argument against a cartoon John Cleese."

Monty Python's Flying Circus met a mixed reception from the gaming press upon its release. Some reviewers felt its combination of platformer and shooter elements to be in keeping with the random nature of the show. Others, however, weren't so taken by its design. And with only four levels, many were also left wanting more.

But it cannot be said that Core didn't faithfully capture the look and feel of classic *Python*. The graphics were praised across the board, as were the *Python* references which came thick and fast – from dead parrots and Spam bonuses to attack squadrons of half-bees and a scoring system that worked backwards.

It's clear the project was a challenging and unusual one to steer, but also one that Simon is incredibly proud to have been a part of.

"I think the game looked the part and embraced the utterly random and surreal nature of the TV show, and I don't think that we could've packed more *Python* into a Spectrum had we had another six months to work on it", answers Simon. "My fondest memory was seeing it finished and on the shelf in WH Smith. At the time, it was the hardest, most difficult-to-pin-down game any of us had ever worked on – a real lesson in making sure that when you start work on a game you've got to have a fairly good idea of where you're trying to get to at the end. But when the licence you're working on is the kind of thing that allows you to just stop in the middle of a…"

» [Amiga] The PC, ST and Amiga versions included an exclusive mini-game based on the famous Argument Sketch; it was one of the last things the team produced for the game.









DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

RICK DANGEROUS
(PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, PC, ST, C64, ZX SPECTRUM, CPC
YEAR: 1989

TOMB RAIDER
SYSTEMS: SATURN, PS, PC
YEAR: 1996

THUNDERHAWK
SYSTEMS: AMIGA, PC, MEGA CD
YEAR: 1992

THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home





IN DEPTH

» This shows you how close the level boss is in relation to your cart. It would be useful if you had a second to draw your eyes away from the action.

» Shooting these signal posts helps you avoid dangerous sections of the track, and occasionally takes you to a different section of the stage.

» Hitting these flashing gold crates of explosives will cause them to blow up, wiping out any nearby enemies.

RAIL CHASE

■ **Developer:** Sega ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Run-and-gun

■ **Running from the same tech as *Power Drift*, and spawning a 1996 sequel, this shooter takes inspiration from the classic mine cart escape scenario. The result is an on-rails light gunner mixed with those virtual rollercoaster rides you'd see at arcades, and this is thanks the cabinet's giant concertina-resembling 'magical bench seat' which bops in time with the on-screen action.**

An amusing black-and-white pencil-sketched rotoscoped intro, which recalls A-ha's 'Take On Me' music video, sets up the story, which centres on an intrepid gun-toting husband and wife duo trying to escape a dangerous drug syndicate after they reclaim an ancient treasure from their hideout.

The levels are divided into four sections, and this bumpy journey takes the couple through caves, over snow-capped mountains, into the gut of a volcano and, dubiously, over the edge of a waterfall. Seriously, could these miners not have picked a more dangerous and longwinded route in and out of their subterranean office?

As its title hints, the action plays out entirely on-rails, but frequent forks in the track which are connected to signal boxes you can shoot help to offer a bit of choice as to how you get through the game. Ultimately though, save for a few rare instances where the trail splits off to lead you to a different section of the level, these choices essentially just boil down to either traversing a perilous stretch of track with a concentrated amount of hazards and dangers, or a tranquil bit with plentiful amounts of first aid boxes to replenish your energy.

The gameplay is equally straightforward, and basically just demands you blast everything that moves, from pointy stalactites to sword waving statues, the obligatory giant boulder and enemies that comprise Middle Eastern gang members, topless tribesman and blokes on snow bikes.

Getting hit by hazards and enemy projectiles not only damages your cart but also slows it down, and if this happens too often you're forced to engage in gunfights with the level boss chasing our two heroes through the stage (although, after a couple of play throughs, we're not entirely unconvinced these encounters aren't scripted).



CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

OPERATION THUNDERBOLT 1989

Though it's not a gun game and was never released in arcades, we have to highlight the absolutely bonkers *Mad Panic Coaster* on PlayStation. Sticking to The Unconverted rules though, we're recommending the co-op on-rails action of *Operation Thunderbolt*.

TANK FORCE

■ **Developer:** Namco ■ **Year:** 1991 ■ **Genre:** Shoot-'em-up



» [Arcade] Enemy tanks can level the city, but if they destroy that turkey insignia at the base of the screen the world ends.

■ **This top-down shooter** by Namco is basically a colourful revamp of two earlier arcade games from the developer, *Tank Battalion* (1980) and the terribly titled follow-up, *Vs. Battle City* (1983).

Tank Force is an arena-based shooter that finds you (either alone or cooperatively) using tanks to protect a base from waves of enemy tanks, and we suspect the game's simplicity and unassuming visuals are most likely the reason why it didn't receive a home port.

As most parts of levels are destructible (you and enemy tanks can blow away blocks of scenery to reshape and deform the playing field), an element of strategy comes into play as you try to move into advantageous positions to give yourself the best chance of surviving and taking out the enemy.

Various power-ups and weapon upgrades help to add some variety to proceedings, and these include a shield, an odd shrinking potion, a handy four-way shot, and the chance to call in an air strike to obliterate all enemies on-screen. A few levels in and the action starts to get more chaotic as new enemy vehicles and different tank types enter the fray.

Tank Force is a neat and unassuming little game, and is our pick of The Unconverted this month.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

TANK BATTALION 1984



Predecessor *Tank Battalion* was ported to a small handful of Japanese home computers, including the X68000 and the MSX. It's therefore a bit of an obscure alternative, but is identical both mechanically and thematically to *Tank Force*. It's just not as pretty.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

THE REAL GHOSTBUSTERS 1987



More top-down shooter than brawler. Still, this licenced game based on the popular *Ghostbusters* animated television series shares a few similarities with *Rock'n Rage* – both good and bad points. It was ported to 8-bit micros, the ST and Amiga.

ROCK'N RAGE

■ **Developer:** Konami ■ **Year:** 1986 ■ **Genre:** Scrolling beat-'em-up



» [Arcade] *Rock'n Rage* is sadly throwaway; perhaps it was trying to capture the coins of drunken music lovers.

■ **Fans of** ***Zombies*** *Ate My Neighbours* (which, funnily enough, was published by Konami) and its sequel *Ghoul Patrol* will most likely get the most from this unusual side-scrolling brawler, which is cut from a similar cloth.

Predating *Bill And Ted's Excellent Adventure* by a few years, *Rock'n Rage* sees two mop-haired rockers, John and Rick, traversing through different time periods to rescue their female singer after she gets kidnapped by a large disembodied blue hand.

Beginning in ancient Egypt, the gameplay sees the pair bashing everything in sight with their instruments (a Flying V guitar or microphone and stand) as they try to find the level exit before fighting a level boss. Smashing up the place reveals musical notes that upgrade your instrument to fire projectiles, and food and drink to earn points.

Sadly, it isn't nearly as enjoyable as the aforementioned LucasArts' games, due to its maddening four-way controls that forbid you from attacking diagonally, and some imprecise collision detection. It also doesn't help matters that you cannot continue from where you die, making the whole experience more rage than rock.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

SUPERIOR SOLDIERS

■ **Developer:** Irem ■ **Year:** 1993 ■ **Genre:** Beat-'em-up



■ **Irem may have** been the masters of the hardcore shooter, but in other genres it was less triumphant. *Superior Soldiers* (known as *Perfect Soldiers* in Japan) is its stab at creating a *Street Fighter II* brawler, but sadly proved a forgettable footnote inside the genre's history book.

With a post-apocalyptic space theme (set in the same universe as *R-Type*), when 90 per cent of humankind gets wiped out by a strange energy known as the 'Force' (ooh, a cheeky *R-Type* reference!) the last remaining survivors do what anyone in this situation would naturally do: become cyborgs and set up a fighting tournament.

With a roster of inane fighters – most of which have small heads, inflated limbs and look nothing like cyborgs (samurai and dinosaur, we're looking dubiously at you) – dull static backgrounds, a garish palette, cack special attacks and stiff combat, you can understand why this brawler never received a home port.


sinclair
commodore 64
POWER
sinclair
ZX Spectrum
C64 RULEZ!
I ♥ SPECCY



PLAYGROUND BATTLES

It's the longest-running debate in UK gaming, after 30 years. And Retro Gamer is determined to finally put the debate to rest after all this time. We speak to the experts, survey our readers and examine the pros and cons of each system to definitively answer the question: which is best: Commodore 64 or Spectrum?

★ GRAPHICS

Let's be honest, right from the start. It's been 30 years since both of these venerable computers were launched and neither of them is looking like a spring chicken. If you'll allow us to put nostalgia aside for a moment, neither computer can boast the best-looking graphics in videogame history. But what's interesting is that both have their own distinct style.

The Commodore 64 suffers from a very blocky look. You can see every pixel that has gone into building up the image, and while there's a certain level of artistry to this, there's no denying that the overall look is a little like an impressionistic painting put together with Lego bricks. And in a strange palette of pastel colours, no less.

The Spectrum, on the other hand, suffered from its own set of problems, not least the infamous colour clash, which saw sprites of different colours change to an unintended hue whenever they passed over each other. The general solution to this was to render each screen in a single colour to avoid clash, but this, of course, gave Spectrum games a monochrome look that contradicted the name of the system and certainly looked a little primitive next to other 8-bit systems.

Charles Cecil, creator of *Broken Sword*, worked for both US Gold and Activision toward the peak of the 8-bit computer era and had extensive experience with both titans of the Eighties. "While the Commodore 64 was technically more powerful, the hardware sprite limitations made the games feel less exciting," Cecil says. "The Spectrum may have been prone to attribute problems, but it could fill the screen with vibrant colours. Developers like Ultimate Play The Game pushed the Spectrum to the limit with their visual, as well as gameplay, masterpieces."

Ste Pickford, one half of the Pickford brothers and co-creator of 8-bit titles like *Zub* and *Feud*, tends to agree with Cecil. "As a graphic artist, I preferred the Spectrum's crisp, clear, brightly coloured pixels over the Commodore 64's smudged, fat, murky browns and greys, despite the colour limitations of the Spectrum," he says, before drawing upon a fittingly retro analogy. "I always wanted to be a comic artist, and grew up on A4-sized black-and-white British comics. Anything from *Whizzer And Chips* to *2000 AD*, to Marvel UK's black-and-white *Spider-Man* reprints – which I much preferred over imported US comics, which were smaller, with smudged, blurry colours and printed on toilet paper. In my head, the Spectrum was like a brilliant issue of *2000 AD*, whereas the C64 was like a rubbish American comic. My preferred drawing style was black-and-white line drawing, so making





Spectrum graphics, using just one pixel colour at a time, suited me much better than the more painterly style required for C64 graphics."

Allowing nostalgia back into the conversation, we have to admit that one of the best things about both computers' graphical styles is that they were instantly identifiable with their host platform. Look at a screenshot of a game developed specifically for the C64 or Spectrum and you don't need a caption to tell you which system you're looking at. Can you say that about the Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3? We doubt even their creators could.

So which is best? Aside from expert opinion, perhaps the fairest way is to look at the way multiformat games compare to each other. While games made specifically for each system play to their strengths and look fantastic in their own right, they fare differently when ported across to the other system. A lot of Spectrum games remained largely the same when ported to the C64, making for some lazy-looking conversions like *Head Over Heels*, which retained the Speccy's monochrome graphics. Yet when C64 games were translated to the Spectrum, they often had to be redrawn completely and therefore got a chance to take better advantage of their new home. *The Last Ninja*, for example, arguably looks even better when ported to the Spectrum by sacrificing colour in exchange for a greater level of detail.



WINNER: ZX SPECTRUM

Though technically inferior, the Spectrum's visuals prove more popular with the experts and handle multiformat development with more grace.

★ SOUND

There really is no contest here. While the ZX Spectrum certainly emitted sound, hardly any of it constituted music or sound effects in the conventional senses of the words. Rather than outputting sound to the television, the original 48K model of the Speccy used a cheap speaker built into the machine itself. Though capable of producing ten separate octaves, it did so through just one channel and the results were about as musical as a Geiger counter. No matter how much talent a programmer had, you weren't going to get anything to whistle along to from this.

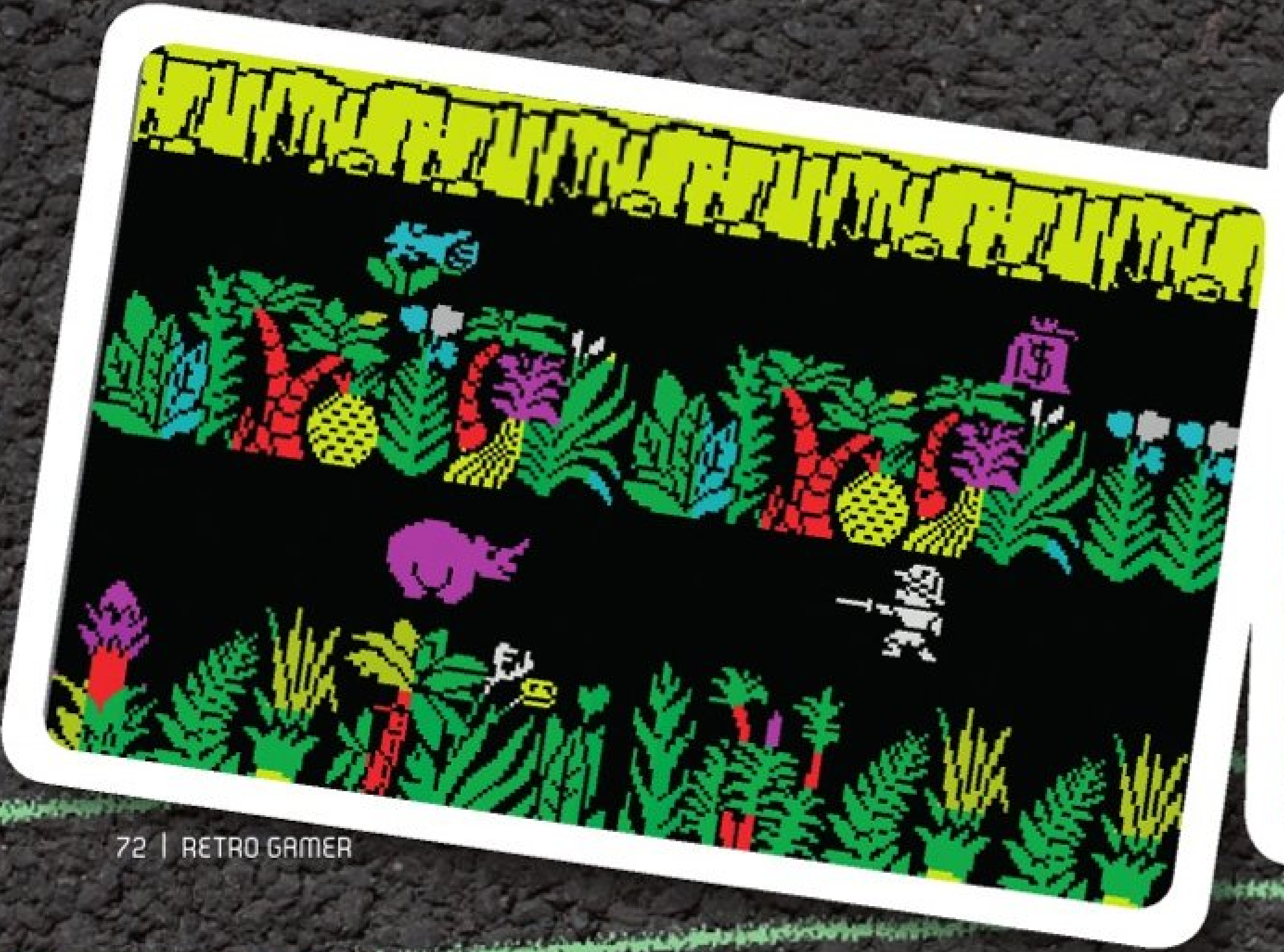
The Commodore 64, by contrast, must have seemed like a full symphony orchestra in your living room. The much-celebrated SID chip sitting inside every Commodore 64 had much more in common with the inner workings of a synthesizer than any comparable home computer of the time, and it basically functioned as such. Capable of creating one of five waveforms across three distinct outputs at once, the SID was a more complex beast than you could ever rightly expect at the time and allowed talented musicians to create some of the true audio masterpieces of the early medium.

If you care to mention any of the great videogame musicians of the home computer age, almost all of them came from the C64. Names like Rob Hubbard, David Whittaker and Martin Galway are as synonymous with the C64, if not more so, than any programmer or artist of the time. Great games like *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, *Wizball* or *International Karate* were made even greater by their memorable scores. C64 game music was so good, in fact, that it translates brilliantly to real instruments, making for enjoyable live performances, but can also be enjoyed in its original format. Downloads of the original SID files are prolific on the internet, and there's even an iPhone app called SID Player that allows users to download and listen to practically every SID tune ever created.

"My first love was always the SID chip," says Jonathan Dunn, the composer behind such C64 games as *Operation Wolf*, *Rambo III* and *The New Zealand Story*. "The possibilities seemed endless and I was always finding new things you could do with it. The AY chip on the Spectrum was useless. Unless you really loved the sound of square waves." Mike Dailly, creator of the C64's *Ballistix* and *Blood Money*, adds simply: "The sound was in a class of its own."

It wasn't just games that benefited from the SID chip either. The little chip soon took on a life of its own as C64 enthusiasts fell in love with its sounds, which were as unique and identifiable as the Commodore 64's graphics. The Ocean loading

> "LOOK AT A GAME AND YOU CAN TELL WHICH YOU'RE LOOKING AT. CAN YOU SAY THAT ABOUT THE 360 OR PS3?"





» [Spectrum] The Speccy's limited palette led to a distinctive graphical style that's quite unlike any other system.

Could Have Been A Contender

The 8-bit computers that don't even factor into our argument

ATARI 8-BIT

In the wake of the videogames crash of 1983, Atari wisely branched out from console games into the world of computers with its range of 8-bit, programmable systems. Though virtually unknown in the UK, these systems were fairly popular in the US and had their fair share of decent titles. Sadly, they never got near the phenomenal popularity of the C64 as a games machine or Apple's business-oriented computers either.

AMSTRAD CPC

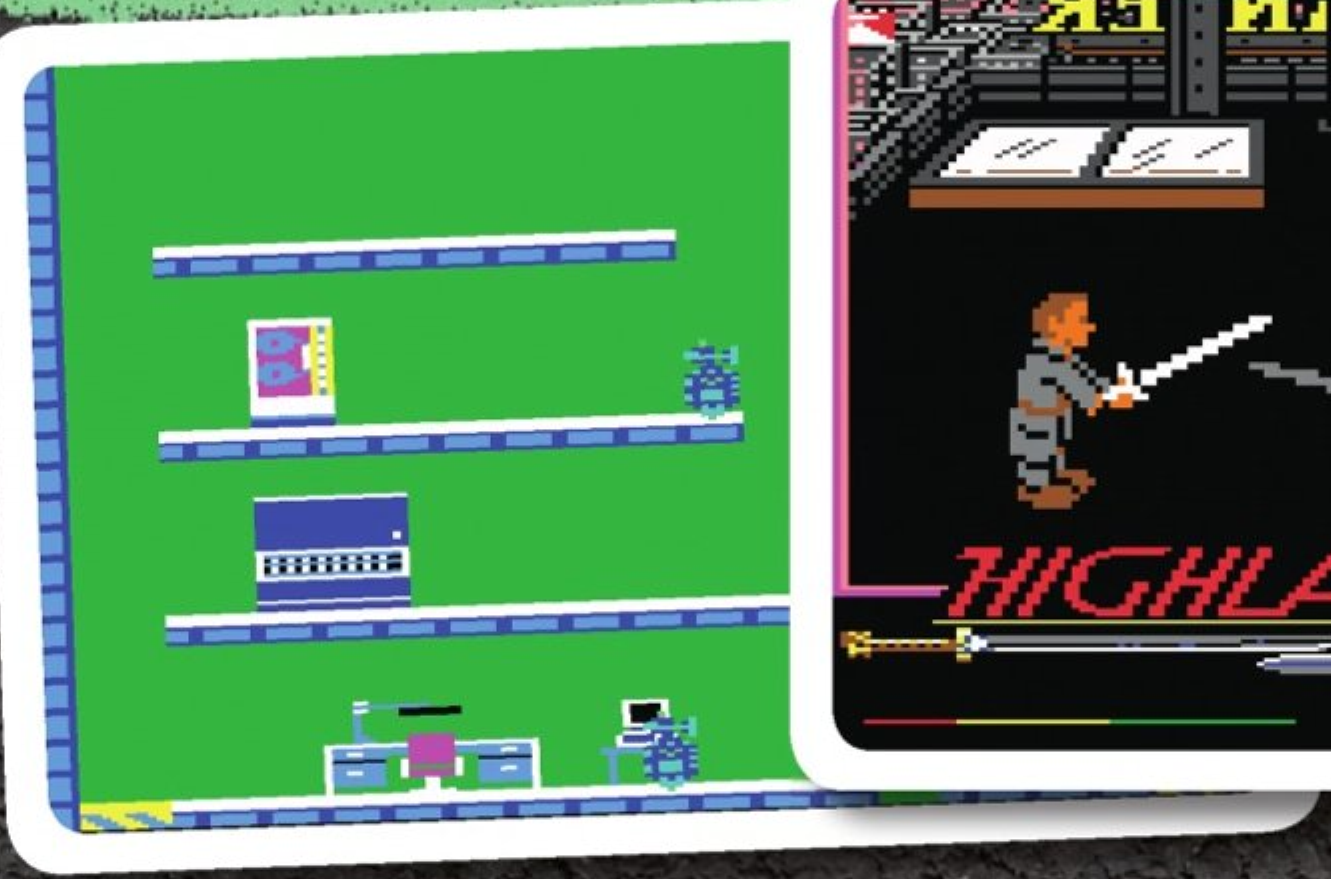
Arguably the closest system to third place in the UK, the CPC sat somewhere between the C64 and Spectrum in terms of capability and appeared to embrace the games industry more than the Sinclair. It garnered strong support in the UK, and some of its conversions are the superior iterations. Ultimately let down by a comparative lack of original titles and international support, the CPC was nevertheless adored by its passionate fan base.

MSX

This early attempt at a standard format was popular in Japan as well as the Netherlands and parts of South America. It's perhaps best known for great Konami games like *Metal Gear, Vampire Killer, Penguin Adventure* and *Parodius*, but these cartridge games were expensive. Tape games were also available but were mostly half-hearted Spectrum ports. Despite its brief popularity, the MSX was ultimately undone by a lack of coherent business.

BBC MICRO

Created by Acorn in conjunction with the BBC, this found its way into nearly every school and became a part of every kid's life as a consequence. Beyond educational software, it had one or two classics to call its own, notably *Elite*. The Micro's downfall is that it didn't manage to get into many homes. Its status as an educational machine just wasn't cool enough, though it can take credit for training a generation of programmers.







» [C64] The graphics on display in *Creatures 2* showed what the Commodore 64 was capable of in the hands of a talented development team.

theme, for example, which played as an Ocean game streamed in from the tape drive, is one of the best compositions of the 8-bit age, completely divorced of association from any specific game. And it didn't stop there. A demo scene quickly sprang up around the SID within the lifetime of the C64, encouraging budding electronic musicians to create their own tracks and enter them into competitions in computing magazines of the time. Into the Nineties, the strength and personality of the SID sound led the C64 to become one of the most prominent features of the burgeoning chiptune movement. And the humble Commodore chip even found its way into popular culture as chart musicians sampled old game tunes or even created their own new tracks on custom-built SID synthesizers.

So there you have it. The Commodore 64's incredible SID chip was responsible for some of the best-sounding games of the 8-bit age and was so good that it has outlived its host machine and even an association with gaming altogether. 30 years after its creation, people are walking around listening to C64 music on their fancy Apple phones or even creating new Commodore music of their own. The Spectrum's tinny little speaker, meanwhile, is left completely forgotten.

WINNER: Commodore 64

A brilliant piece of hardware design led to some of the most memorable videogame tunes of the Eighties and was arguably responsible for a whole new genre of music. There's just no beating the sound of a C64.

* DEVELOPMENT

You don't need to pry open the casings of either computer to see that the Commodore 64 was the technically superior piece of hardware. But does that mean that it was the best of the two to develop for? Not necessarily. Ste Pickford explains his reasons why not…

"Once I started working at a large development studio, making Spectrum and C64 games together in the same open-plan office, the playground argument carried on but with an added technical dimension. The hardware sprites and scrolling of the C64 meant that it was possible, without that much skill or talent, to get a sprite moving on a scrolling background, and as a consequence there were a lot of rubbish C64 programmers about back then. There were plenty of amazing C64 programming geniuses as well, but it was a mixed bag. The Spectrum's less-helpful hardware – more or less just a processor and some oddly laid-out VRAM – meant that to even get a sprite moving around on the screen you had to be a pretty decent programmer, so as a consequence all the Spectrum guys were sharp and clever, or they wouldn't have got the job. This turned the platform argument into one about good programmers versus bad programmers, with jokes about C64 games with panels on the right-hand side of the screen because the programmers couldn't handle the MSB."

Have a look at a few screenshots and it's easy to see what Pickford is getting at. In the wrong hands, the C64 produced some truly horrifying results. Take US Gold's conversion of *Street Fighter II*, for example. The mess of coloured blobs seemingly thrown on top of each other made it look as though the C64 had thrown up all of the contents of its metaphorical stomach at once, while the buggy, haphazard gameplay certainly lends credence to the idea that the low barrier to entry for C64 development attracted technically unskilled talent.

Yet the opposite is also true. Match up talented coders and artists with the power of the C64 and

the results were spectacular. Masterpieces – and we mean *masterpieces* – like *International Karate* or *Maniac Mansion* ran brilliantly and looked more attractive than just about anything else out there. Including, it could be argued, anything on consoles like the NES or Master System. And towards the end of the C64's life, a new wave of games, like the unbelievably pretty *Creatures 2*, demonstrated just how far the system could be pushed in the right hands.

"I prefer the C64 for coding because it had lots of hardware to play with and produced silky smooth gaming," says Mike Dailly. "The Speccy was a great but simple machine to start learning with, but the C64 was the one you really wanted; lots of RAM, lots of toys, and great games, which sounded amazing."

That's not to say that the Spectrum couldn't be made to do unexpected things, though. Far from it. As Ste Pickford suggests, the restrictions of the Spectrum hardware – which was arguably designed more as a hobbyist's computer than one intended for mass-produced, commercial software – forced developers to be more creative and led them to explore technical avenues unnecessary on other platforms. Another Pickford, Ste's brother John, clarifies: "The C64 was clearly more capable graphically and better designed as a videogames machine. From a coding point of view, the Spectrum was simpler and the lack of any hardware-assisted sprites or scrolling meant you had to get creative and work out how to do those things in software with very limited CPU power. By the time you've worked out how to drag a sprite across the screen you've learned a hell of a lot compared to doing the same on the 64. So yeah, I guess the 64 was the better machine, but I'm glad I learned my trade on the Spectrum."

Both Pickfords touch on an extremely important point. Since the Spectrum's limited hardware forced coders to get creative, the system was the best teacher you could hope for and made geniuses out of an entire nation of bedroom programmers. The Spectrum, more so than any other system, is the crucible of the British games industry, and without it such great UK studios as Rare, Blitz or Codemasters may never have existed.

WINNER: ZX SPECTRUM

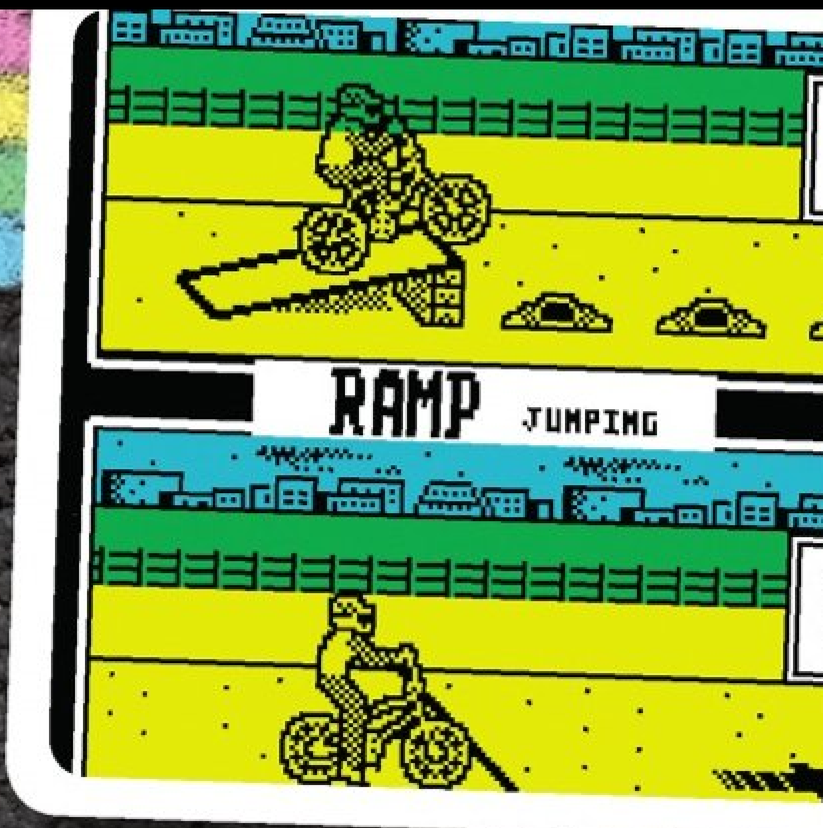
Ease of development may be considered a must in the modern age, but in the formative years of the games industry it was the foibles of the primitive Spectrum that sorted the wheat from the chaff and allowed great programmers to rise to the top. Its legacy – the UK games industry of 2012 – cannot be overlooked.

SUPPORT

How important is support to the success of a games system? It's easy to overlook this factor, but without the support of games developers, a console or computer is just an expensive slab of plastic that competes with your TV for all the dust in the room.

Both the Commodore 64 and the Spectrum enjoyed incredible support from game developers, but in vastly different ways. And the key differentiator between the two should be obvious to anyone who was paying attention: the Spectrum had incredible British support, whereas the Commodore 64 was a truly international computer.

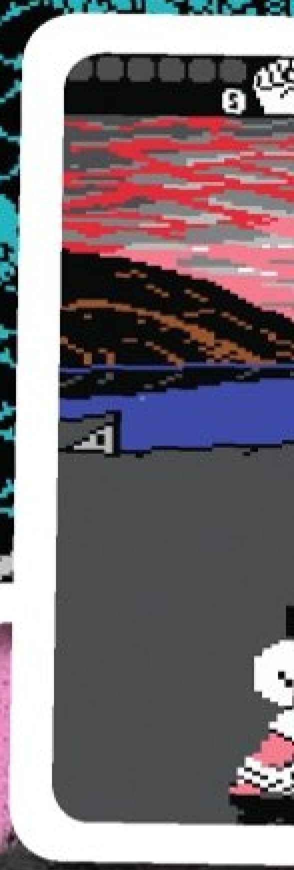
Perhaps this was inevitable. Sinclair was a relatively tiny UK-based company that started off selling kit-built computers by mail order and never really progressed too far beyond those humble origins. Commodore, or Commodore Business Machines, to give it its full title, was







» [Spectrum] *Head Over Heels* started out as a Spectrum game and therefore suffered graphically in comparison to the C64's own hits when it was ported.

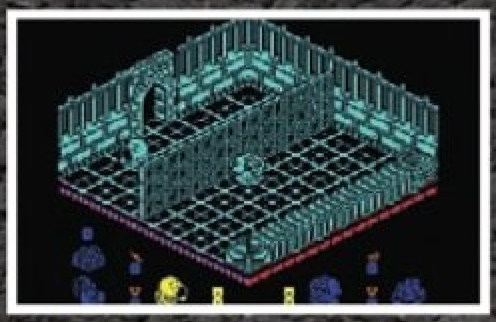


THE 5 MOST IMPORTANT SPECTRUM GAMES

JET SET WILLY

Made by a 17-year-old rockstar programmer, about a millionaire miner with a hangover, and so broken it couldn't be completed without cheat codes, *Jet Set Willy* is the prototypical Spectrum game. An experience like this could only have been made in the Eighties and on the Speccy.





HEAD OVER HEELS

This ingenious adventure game combined more wacky British humour with a unique gameplay concept that has yet to be bettered. *Head Over Heels* proves that imagination and talent count so much more than beefy system specs.

SKOOL DAZE

A game without a genre, *Skool Daze* took a setting that almost every Spectrum owner must have loathed and gave them the power to make school fun. This was a game all about play for the sake of play and another example of the free imagination made possible by bedroom programming.



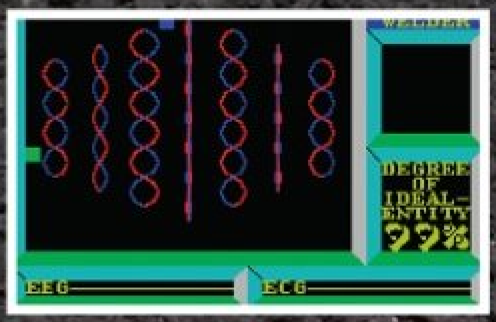


TRASHMAN

Many games put the player in control of an aspirational hero – soldier, cop, ninja or sportsman – but on the Spectrum it seemed like anyone could be a hero – even a binman. *Trashman* did little to sex up the profession, though you could find an old Speccy in the bin if you were lucky.

DEUS EX MACHINA

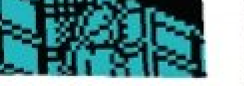
This adventure got around the limitations of the hardware by including a separate soundtrack tape, featuring voiceover from Jon Pertwee, Frankie Howard and Ian Dury. A sequel is in the works, featuring the vocal talents of Sir Christopher Lee.







» [C64] The *Dizzy* series is one of many 8-bit franchises with roots on both systems, and it's one that survives today through the recent iOS revival.





a titan by comparison. The American company easily rivalled its contemporaries like Apple or Atari for its deep pockets, marketing clout and vision. Its combined resources and ambition made it virtually unstoppable, at least for a few years anyway.

Commodore really had its act together when it came to support of the C64, particularly for games. The Commodore-branded 'Datasette' recorder allowed software to load much more reliably than the pernickety Spectrum, meaning there was no fiddling around with volume controls or sacrificing a pet to Satan in the vain hope of getting a game to load here. Likewise, the 1541 disk drive, for those who could afford one, brought even greater usability and was particularly instrumental in the American home computer boom, leading to major players like Electronic Arts and LucasFilm Games lending their considerable weight to the C64 library.

It's possible that the Spectrum could have enjoyed such support too, but Sinclair's head, Sir Clive Sinclair, appeared to have little interest in supporting videogames, despite the boost they obviously gave the computing business, and the company showed little sign of attempting to get games developers on board. Only the huge UK installed base, created by the Spectrum's brilliantly affordable price point, encouraged independent UK games publishers to get involved with the system. But the support of the burgeoning American games industry was severely lacking.

To get some idea of the non-impact the Spectrum had in the US, **Retro Gamer** spoke to Shane R Monroe, host of Retro Gaming Radio, who was a young man during the C64's heyday. "Commodore had a huge presence everywhere – you couldn't turn around without running into a Commodore display," Monroe says of the Eighties American retail landscape. "Unlike the Amiga, which got zero advertising, the C64 was in every department store – including then-popular shopping destinations like JCPenney and Sears. I believe, for a period of time, even Toys R Us carried Commodore product. During the holidays, you couldn't turn the channel without landing on a C64 ad, complete with the Bach theme that became a household tune. The USA is all about what's on TV, even more then than now. Without the internet to guide people, TV is what you had.

"The Spectrum simply wasn't to be found. No demo machines. No TV commercials. No word of mouth. The elitist fights then were 'C64 vs Atari' or 'C64 vs Apple'. Spectrum wasn't even part of the equation. Between Commodore's rampant advertising, Atari's hardcore name recognition and gaming background, and Apple's incessant product dumping into the school system, there just wasn't room for the Speccy."

UK-based **Retro Gamer** readers might think that the US fate of the Spectrum was irrelevant to

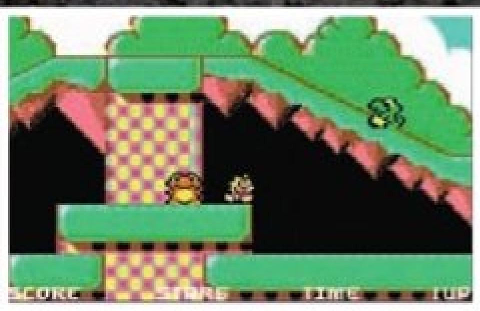
> "The Spectrum had incredible British support, whereas the C64 was an international computer"

The 5 Most Important Commodore 64 Games

International Karate

***IK* features everything** that's great about C64 gaming. Stunning visuals, a brilliant soundtrack and gameplay so fun you could play it over and over again. That Archer Maclean made a fighting game work with a stick and one button is *IK*'s greatest achievement.





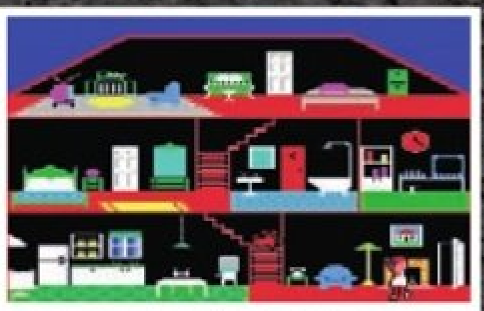
Mayhem In Monsterland

Made near the end of the C64's life, *Mayhem In Monsterland* exploded with colour, looking as good as a Japanese platform game and playing equally well. If anyone accuses the C64 of featuring Lego-style visuals, just show them this.

Maniac Mansion

Bedroom programming is all well and good, but look what happened when huge companies got their hands on the C64! *Maniac Mansion* was filled with ambitious design that even its creators failed to match. It's also the debut of SCUMM, the engine that redefined adventures.





Little Computer People

One of the most ingenious uses of the floppy disk, this David Crane production gave you a house on a disk, and a little man who seemed to live inside your TV. The level of illusion on display is nothing short of remarkable for the time and paved the way for later works like *The Sims*.

Alter Ego

Made by a psychologist rather than a game designer, *Alter Ego* saw you play out an entire life from conception to death – whether by natural causes or otherwise. Its series of moral dilemmas and philosophical questions treated the player like a mature adult.

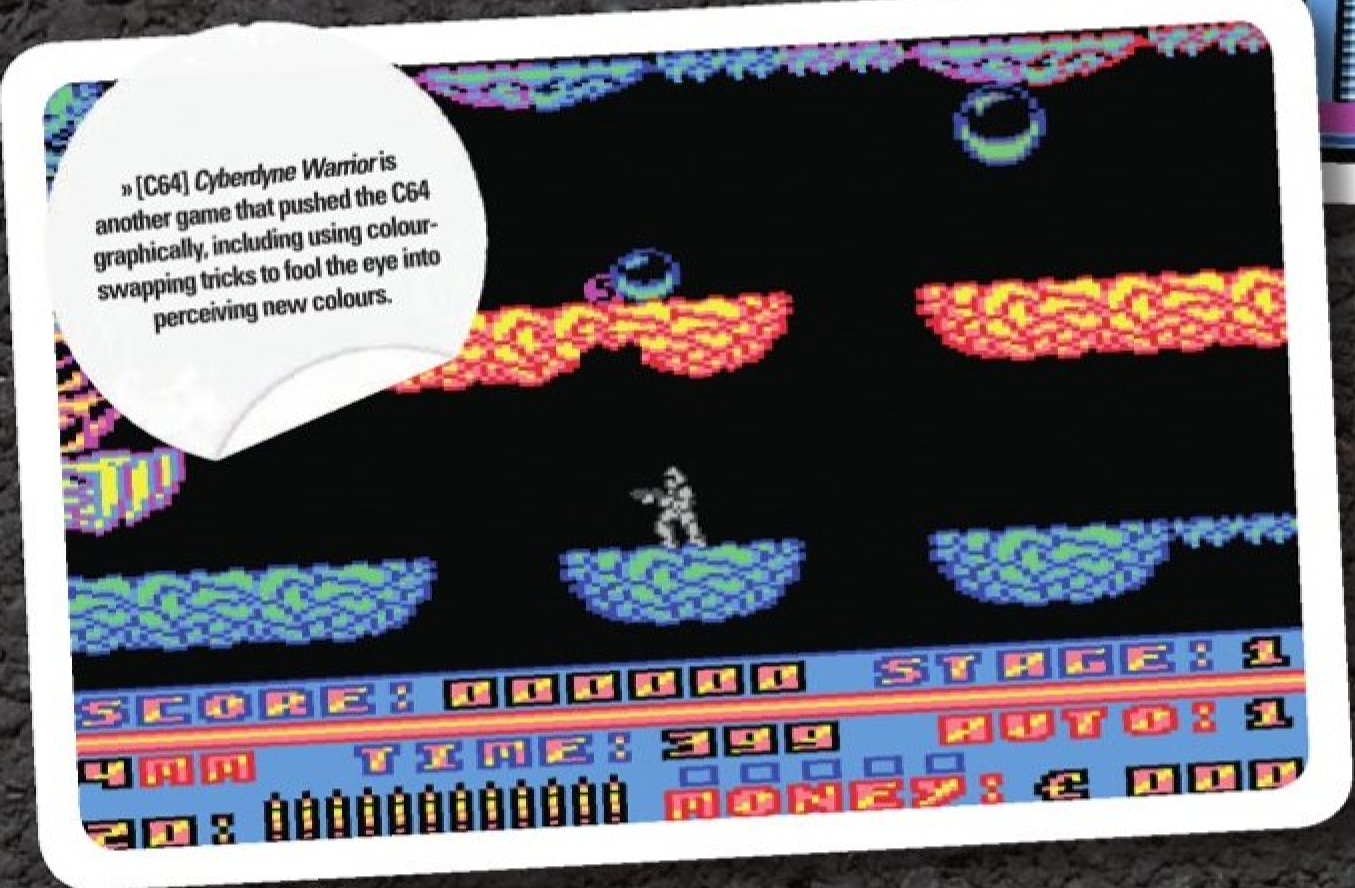












» [C64] *Cyberdyne Warrior* is another game that pushed the C64 graphically, including using colour-swapping tricks to fool the eye into perceiving new colours.



them, but it couldn't have been more important. While the Commodore 64 received excellent UK support and conversions of most of the significant Spectrum, Amstrad or BBC games, its US origins meant that it got a whole wealth of other classics that its rival systems missed out on. The Spectrum's catalogue of software, by comparison, seemed half-empty.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64

Officially supported two years longer than the Spectrum, showered with superior hardware, and attracting the cream of the US games industry, the Commodore 64 had the best support you could ever realistically hope for.

era and made the Eighties a fantastic time to get into videogames.

We could go on and on about the best games on each computer, and have done elsewhere in this feature, but for now let's allow the experts to have their say.

"For me, this is an easy question with an easy answer," says Sensible Software's Jon Hare. "Not only was the Commodore 64 a better machine in nearly all respects, it was also much better for our games. *Parallax*, *Wizball*, *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit*, *MicroProse Soccer* and *International 3D Tennis*... So C64 all the way for me." Hare may be a little biased, sure, but there's no denying that is one great list of games.

> "REAL GAMERS JUST WANT DECENT GAMES TO PLAY, REGARDLESS OF WHAT THEY PLAY THEM ON"

★ GAMES

Retro Gamer interviewed a fair few game developers in the hope of settling this age-old argument, but some simply refused to pick sides. Much to our surprise, one of the most vehement fence-sitters was none other than Gary Penn, ex-editor of Commodore 64 magazine *Zzap!64*. "There were some groundbreaking, seminal works on both Spectrum and C64," says the level-headed Penn. "It'd be ignorant to ignore that fact. Real gamers just want decent games to play, regardless of what they play them on."

Well, if it's great games you're after then anyone reading this magazine knows that the C64 and Spectrum could match each other blow-for-blow. For every *Wizball* there's a *Sabre Wulf*, for every *Skool Daze* a *Paradroid*. Each system has its fair share of titles that defined the 8-bit



Charles Cecil, meanwhile, credits a single game for swinging his vote: "With the release of *Impossible Mission* in 1984, a magnificently impressive game, the Commodore 64 finally surged ahead, remaining forever out of reach of the Spectrum."

Vocal support for the Speccy's catalogue of games is harder to come by, but Ste Pickford chimes in to remind us of some greats. "In the end, I think the Spectrum wins because ultimately the difficult hardware – the lack of a 'path of least resistance' to scrolling-background sprite games – meant that there was more creativity and originality in the Spectrum software catalogue," he says. "We got more odd and unusual games like *Knight Lore*, *Tau Ceti*, *Ant Attack*, *Avalon*, *TLL* and *Deus Ex Machina*, even if we did miss out on smooth, 60fps scrolling shoot-'em-ups."

Pickford is certainly right about the Spectrum's quirkiness. No other games machine outside

Japan can list such a bonkers line-up of software. Millionaire miners, handbag-carrying dogs, scrounging binmen and criminal babies were perfectly commonplace on the Spectrum, and gave the system a weird British feeling that was part surrealist comedy, part acid trip. You can't not love a system for that. But, well…

A lot of those quirky games were eventually ported to the Commodore 64, which also happened to have its fair share of unique classics on top. While the Spectrum was defined by its quirky British games, some fine arcade conversions and the tremendous support of Ultimate Play The Game, the C64 had a catalogue that grew up and evolved alongside the machine. With each passing year, its greatest developers outdid themselves to produce ever more brilliant experiences – particularly in the crucial US market. Back when Electronic Arts was best known for its designer-driven creations, it churned out classic after classic – *Racing Destruction Set, M.U.L.E. The Bard's Tale* and *Legacy Of The Ancients*, to name just a few. Then there's LucasFilm Games and, particularly, *Maniac Mansion*, a game so good it practically spawned a genre and paved the way for incredible works like *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. Over in the UK, the likes of System 3 and Sensible Software made the C64 sing with *International Karate, Impossible Mission* and *Wizball*, among others. Even in the computer's twilight years, new developers pushed the system further. Could you have imagined games like *Creatures* or *Mayhem In Monsterland* running on the C64 back in 1982? You couldn't, but the hardware was the same. The only thing that changed was the industry's understanding of it.

The Commodore 64 remained in production for a staggering 12 years and was constantly supported by an ever-evolving catalogue of games. Only the demise of Commodore in 1994 brought the system to a halt. Who knows where it would have gone if the company had survived. The Spectrum, meanwhile, was discontinued by 1992, though its shelf life, and the breadth of its software, arguably dried up long before that.

WINNER: COMMODORE 64

While both systems matched each other for some time, the C64 just about wins out due to sheer lastability. It kept going and going for years, outlasting its rival and improving on itself with every release. The C64's vast catalogue of classics narrowly gives it the edge.

* CONCLUSION

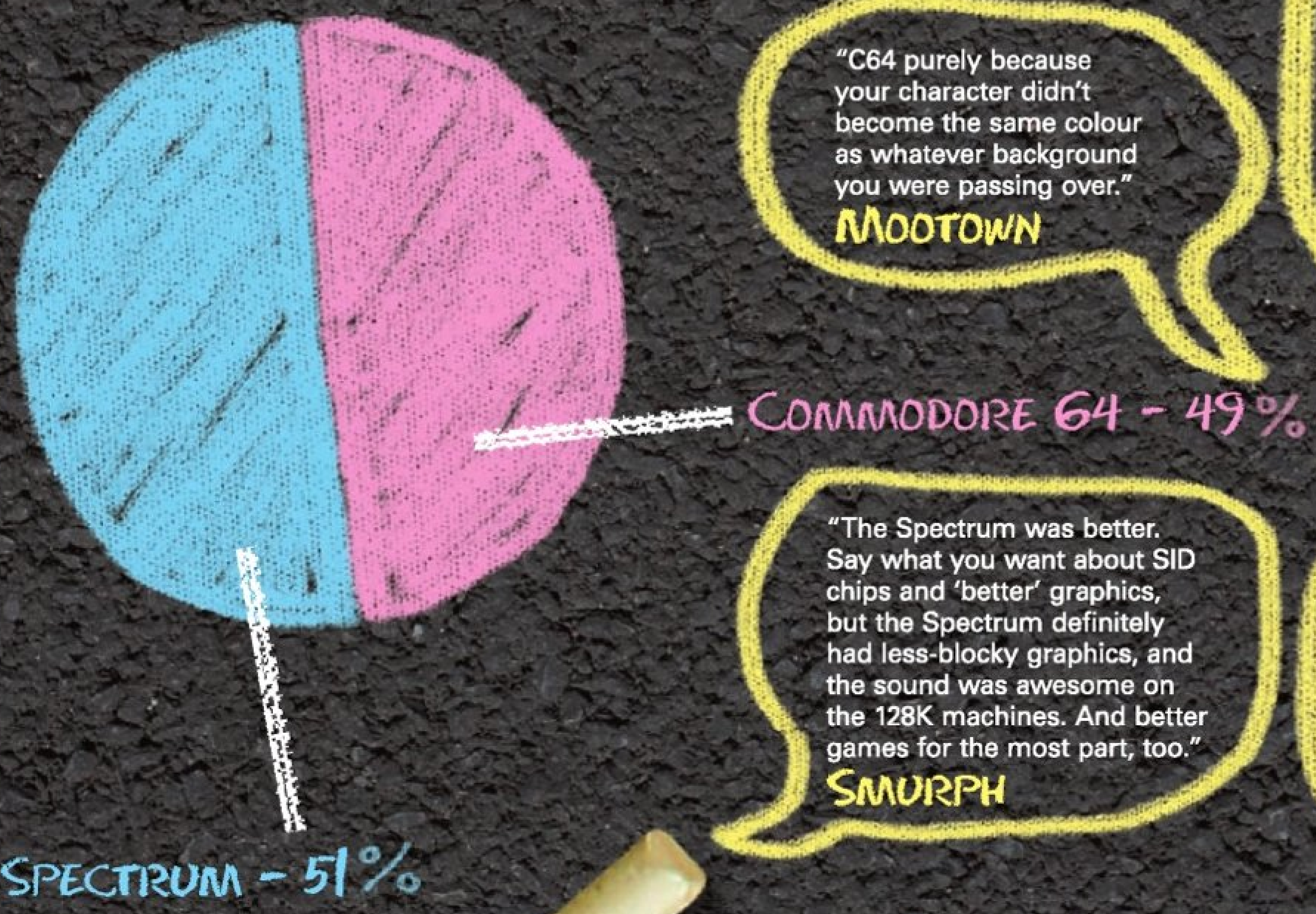
Obviously the most advanced and powerful piece of hardware, you'd think that the Commodore 64 would stamp all over the Spectrum, but, certainly in the UK, the competition was no walk in the park. The Speccy's affordability, utterly crazy and ultimately endearing catalogue of games, and its importance to the UK games industry make it a supremely special system. But the Commodore 64 is just that little bit superior.

With the power of Commodore behind it, and the backing of the international games industry, the C64 enjoyed a long life with well over a decade's worth of incredible games produced. The technical prowess of the machine, as well as the added flexibility of the disk drive, led to the creation of some amazing games for their time, and while the Pickford brothers may be right that the C64 encouraged lazy developers, it also attracted many of the best. Not to mention the best musicians, who tripped over themselves to play with the SID chip and create musical masterpieces that have taken on a life of their own outside the games.

Speccy fans – don't get your knickers in a twist. We love the rubber-keyed wunderkind as much as you. But the simple fact is that the Commodore 64 is a greater machine, with bigger, arguably more important games. Especially since they're so much easier to load and don't get confused by more than one colour! The Commodore 64 is the best 8-bit computer. Argument over.

READERS' VIEW

WE ASKED RETRO GAMER'S FORUM TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE C64 AND SPECCY. TURNS OUT THEY DISAGREE WITH US. BUT ONLY JUST…



"C64 purely because your character didn't become the same colour as whatever background you were passing over."
MOOTOWN

"With the C64, once you get past the better-quality shooters there's not a lot there to match the Spectrum's impressive array of arcade adventures and platformers. The Spectrum also canes the C64 for text adventures, which is important for me. The fact that Ultimate's output on the Speccy utterly trounces what they put out on the C64 is probably enough reason on its own to relegate the C64 to second place."
CRUNCHY

"The Spectrum was better. Say what you want about SID chips and 'better' graphics, but the Spectrum definitely had less-blocky graphics, and the sound was awesome on the 128K machines. And better games for the most part, too."
SMURPH

"I voted Speccy. In all honesty, it's because I owned one, but I will say, when it came to going to friends' houses, it was the Speccy that seemed to have the 'jaw drop' moments that made others jealous. Best I remember was when I helped a friend fire up his first computer, which was a second-hand Spectrum +2. I loaded up *Starstrike II*, and even the C64 boys were drooling!"
THULSADOOM

THE CLASSIC GAME



Sega's *Golden Axe* was first unleashed in arcades in 1989. It immediately caused a stir upon its release thanks to its impressive visuals, imaginative fantasy setting and frantic multiplayer action that saw three friends joining together to hunt down the dangerous Death Adder, who had stolen the mythical Golden Axe of the title. Filled with a bestiary of fantastical monsters, huge bosses, exotic locations and an awesome array of magic special attacks, *Golden Axe* remains an excellent beat-'em-up that still manages to impress. Darran Jones returns to the battle-scarred world of Yuria and explains why Sega's hit still deserves your precious time.

AX BATTLER

This musclebound barbarian favours earth magic and the broad sword. He's seeking revenge against Death Adder for the murder of his mother and shouldn't be trifled with. He would later get his own spin-off game for the Game Gear called *Ax Battler: A Legend Of Golden Axe*.

TYRIS FLARE

This sexy Amazonian fighter is a firm favourite with players due to her excellent fire magic and extremely flimsy clothing. Like her companions, she has felt the wrath of Death Adder – both her parents were killed by him – and now seeks revenge. She wields a long sword with deadly precision.

GILIUS THUNDERHEAD

Hailing from the mines of Wolud, Gilius Thunderhead seeks to avenge the death of his brother, who was slain at the hands of Death Adder. Unlike his companions, Gilius fights with a battleaxe and likes to utilise the arcane power of lightning magic.

DEATH ADDER

Current owner of the mythical Golden Axe and currently ruling Yuria, Death Adder is one mean dude. He has the King and Princess in bonds and sits behind a huge army of enemies. Rumours suggest, however, that he's not the real mastermind behind the taking of Yuria…

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

WHY IT'S A CLASSIC



It's thematically excellent

Golden Axe's biggest draw at its time of release was the fact that it was so different to other beat-'em-ups of the time. Inspired by hit Eighties films like *Conan The Barbarian* and *The Sword And The Sorcerer*, its distinct fantasy setting was a world away from the many urban brawlers that were available, which made it immediately stand apart from its peers. Even today, that fantasy setting can still draw you in, presenting you with vicious monsters, wondrous magic attacks and some immense bosses to fight. It's a little clunky, sure, but it remains a hell of a lot of fun to play.

BEST BOSS



Death Adder, not Blackadder

There are a number of memorable bosses found throughout *Golden Axe*'s running time, but Sega definitely saved the best for last. Huge in stature and wielding the fabled Golden Axe, Death Adder cuts an imposing figure. Protected by minions, including some extremely vicious skeletons, he's a dab hand at combat, effortlessly swinging the huge axe, while using devastating magic to take out those who stay out of range. He's also extremely tough, taking a massive amount of punishment before he finally gives up the titular axe, which flies spectacularly through the air before landing in his chest.

BEST LEVEL



Wind beneath my wings

One of our favourite aspects of *Golden Axe* is the degree of imagination and variety that has been packed into its clever level design. The fantasy world Sega created may borrow heavily from many different movies of the time, but they still manage to be filled with plenty of imagination. While Turtle Village is a particular highlight, it's the level that sees the heroes battle across the back of a giant eagle that remains the most memorable. Packed with deadly skeletons, feathers continually fly past the screen, giving a wonderful sensation of speed, as you battle against the undead foes.

BEST CHARACTER



Nobody tosses a dwarf

He may be small, but Gilius Thunderhead is our favourite character in *Golden Axe*. He's obviously a firm favourite with staff as well, as he features in all three Mega Drive games, as well as the underrated arcade game *Golden Axe: The Revenge Of Death Adder*, and has popped up in numerous other Sega games including *Shining In The Darkness*, *Alien Storm* and *Sega Superstar Tennis*. Fast on his feet and armed with a deadly double-headed axe, Gilius's lightning magic takes less time to charge, while his special attack gives him huge reach. In short, he's the perfect choice for solo play.

BEST CONVERSION



A truly mega conversion

Golden Axe was released on a variety of 8- and 16-bit computers. All are pretty solid. The 8-bit efforts are decent, with the C64 version receiving an impressive 96% back in issue 67 of *Zzap!64*. The Amiga and Atari ST conversions are also of a high standard. By far the best though is Sega's own conversion of its hit coin-op for the Mega Drive. In addition to being extremely faithful to the original coin-op it also boasts a number of extra features, including Dual mode and an additional two levels, including a climatic fight with Death Adder's mentor, Death Bringer.

BEST MOMENT



Enter the dragon

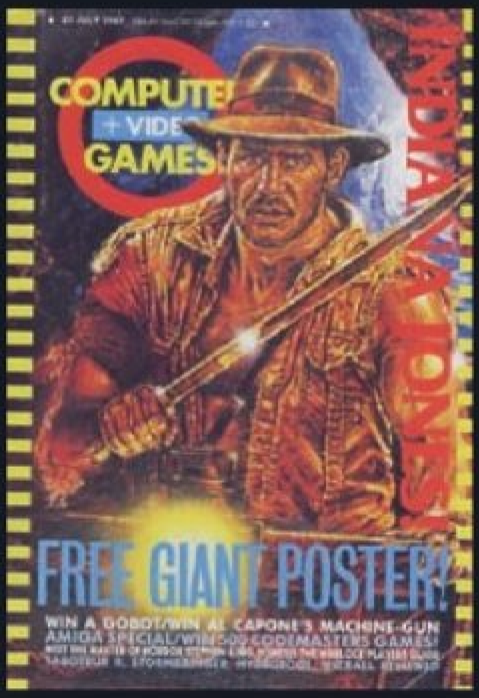
Kicking pixies in the arse to make them relinquish potions, jumping on the many bizzarians and using them as mounts, and successfully taking down your first skeleton are all memorable highlights of Sega's excellent beat-'em-up. However, the most impressive moment by far occurs whenever you unleash magic attacks on your hapless victims. Tyris Flare's magical attacks may require a large number of potions, but the effects are definitely worth it. Build her meter up to full and you'll be rewarded with a huge dragon whose fiery breath decimates all but the toughest of bosses.



IN THE KNOW

- **PLATFORM:** ARCADE
- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **RELEASED:** 1989
- **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP

What the press said… ages ago



Computer & Video Games

"Another winner from Sega, and one which seems exceedingly popular at the moment. Have a bash on this one as soon as it reaches your local arcade."

What we think

It's obviously showing its age now, but *Golden Axe* remains great fun to play, especially with a friend in tow. A highly enjoyable beat-'em-up that stands the test of time, and not just because we love Tyris Flare.

The Making Of



Craig Grannell dons his comedy springy shoes and bounces over to Curve Studios to meet co-founder Jason Perkins, once part of Micro Projects, who saved Thing On A Spring from a fate worse than death: videogame mediocrity




» Jason Perkins



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- » **DEVELOPER:** JASON PERKINS
- » **RELEASED:** 1985
- » **PLATFORM:** C64 (LATER CONVERTED TO AMSTRAD CPC)
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORM

These days, it's commonplace for a videogame to be storyboarded and focus-tested until it screams, such are the budgets involved. But in the industry's early days, coders and games creators were more fast and loose with their work, often making it up as they went along. With luck and a following wind, a game would rapidly evolve in an organic fashion, changing shape many times over the course of a few months, and emerge blinking into the light as a classic. Alternatively, you ended up with *Thing On A Spring*, a project going nowhere and looking for someone to put it out of its misery – or to perform a life-saving miracle.

Luckily for Gremlin Graphics and the spring-based hero of its stalled game, MD Ian Stewart had decided to visit the windowless Stevenage offices of Micro Projects. The company had been founded by Jason Perkins (who later co-founded Curve Studios, where he currently works), Tony Clarke and Mark Rogers, with the aim of developing games for the C16. "Our entire output was sucked up and published by Gremlin Graphics, who had a fantastic appetite for C16 software and was a leading publisher on that platform," recalls Jason. "But on that day, Ian showed us a game Gremlin had been developing in Sheffield for the C64, with the working title *Thing On A Spring*…"



Jason remembers the game had been worked on for over six months – a very long development period for the mid-Eighties – and there was little to show for it: "All they really had was a *Breakout*-style game where the bat was the Thing character. It was very apparent to everyone that the game had hit a dead-end." But it wasn't all bad news, as the game's central character had potential: "We saw animation sequences that *Monty Mole* creator Pete Harrap had done – walk cycles, jumps and a mesmerising idle cycle. We were particularly impressed by this as, by trade, Pete was a programmer – and a Spectrum programmer at that!"

The consensus was the game needed saving, and Ian proposed that the Micro Projects team move to Gremlin's Sheffield studio to assist the *Thing On A Spring* coder. "Like nervous contestants on *Dragons' Den*, we asked if we could huddle and consider the offer," jokes Jason. Ian temporarily left the office and the team had a natter. "While a few months in Sheffield was appealing, working with another coder and trying to fix up the code to turn '*Thing Breakout*' into a good game was not. We were unanimous that we would take on the project, but would start from scratch and develop it at our office." Ian wasn't entirely happy about the decision, because he had an investment in the existing code. With further thought, he relented, but only if the game was completed within just six weeks.

Ian returned to Gremlin's relatively lavish and fully windowed HQ, and Jason and the team started brainstorming ideas. "We agreed





» [C64] Thing might blend into this level's background colour, but it won't hide him from the evil toys.



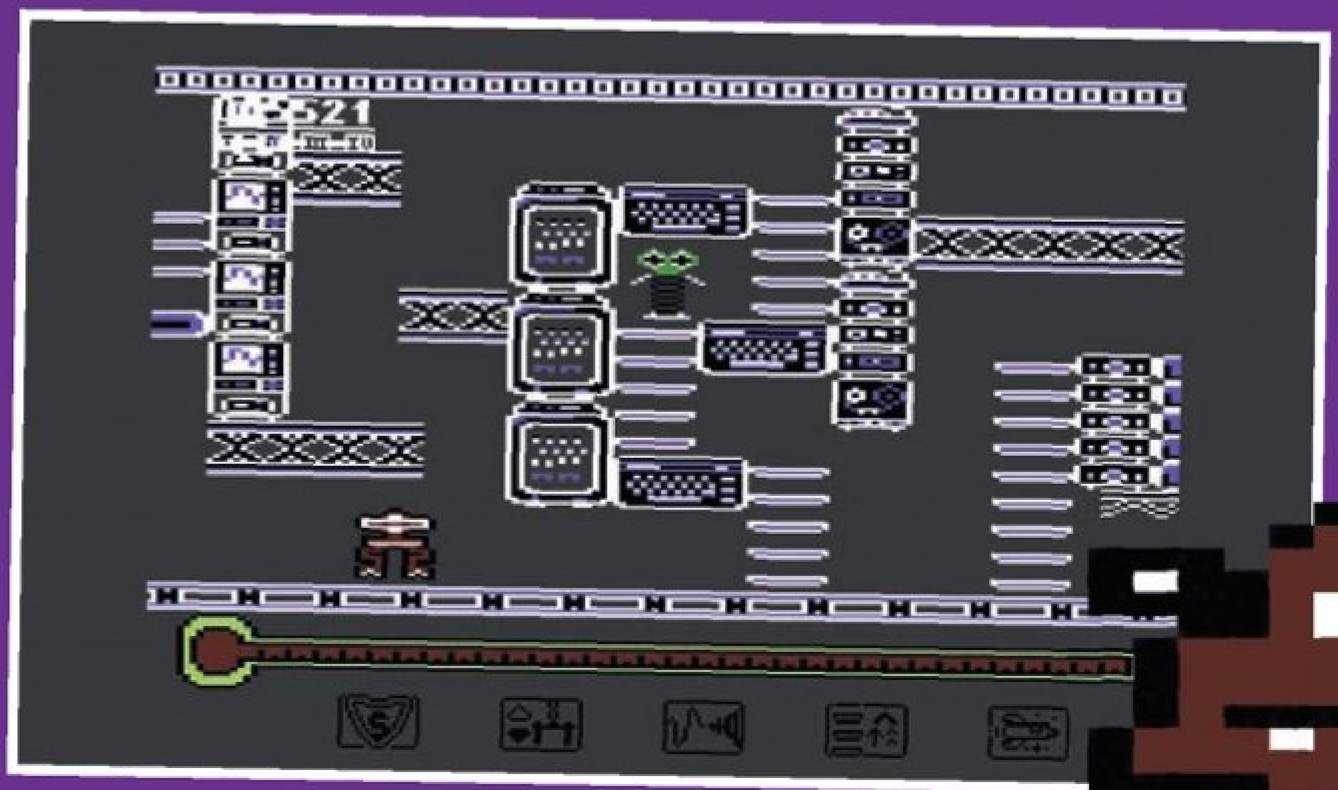
we wanted to dump the original concept, which was a collection of mini-games based on popular titles of the time, featuring Thing as the main character," recalls Jason, the reasoning being that the short deadline meant such a design was no longer feasible. Instead, the team decided that platform games were popular and that kind of environment would lend itself nicely to the rather bouncy main character.

Having observed that Thing resembled a jack-in-the-box, Mark Rogers inspired the team's decision to set the game in an evil toy factory, with Thing being a hero planning a great escape. At this point, Mark started work on character and environment concepts, Tony began building a level editor, and Jason developed the game's code, starting with the main player control system. Within a few days, the team had the character moving around the screen, bouncing off basic objects, and started experimenting with having Thing smash through solid blocks and making double-height jumps.

As the second week rolled around, the game began to blossom. The team implemented a number of platform game mechanics, such as conveyor belts, escalators and dissolving blocks. Mark then started building the first test level. "It was when playing this level for the first time that we realised we had a problem, because the bouncy dynamics of the character didn't lend itself to an enclosed level design," recalls Jason. "Something had to change, and so we opted to restrict Thing's movement so that he would be easier to control within the level Mark had designed." In hindsight, Jason thinks this was the wrong choice, because it meant losing some of the dynamic movement of Thing, and a number of fun elements that the team had prototyped, but the tight schedule meant the project had to move on. "And so once this was all agreed, Mark got to work on designing more levels and Tony started on the title page and high-score table. I remember he was particularly pleased with his sprite multiplexing, which allowed him to get 16 sprites on screen at once to form the title of the game!"

> Ian had an investment in the existing code and insisted that the game was completed within just six weeks

The team was now fast approaching its deadline, halfway into the allotted time. Jason started work on enemies to populate the levels and give Thing a trickier task. "Mark had drawn some fun sprites and had interesting ideas on how they could move and interact on the screen," he remembers. "One idea was to get two characters to link together and attack Thing as a single entity. I started to prototype this and, unsurprisingly, it turned out to be a


» [C64] The technical centre of the evil goblin's factory, seemingly powered by glued-together C64s.

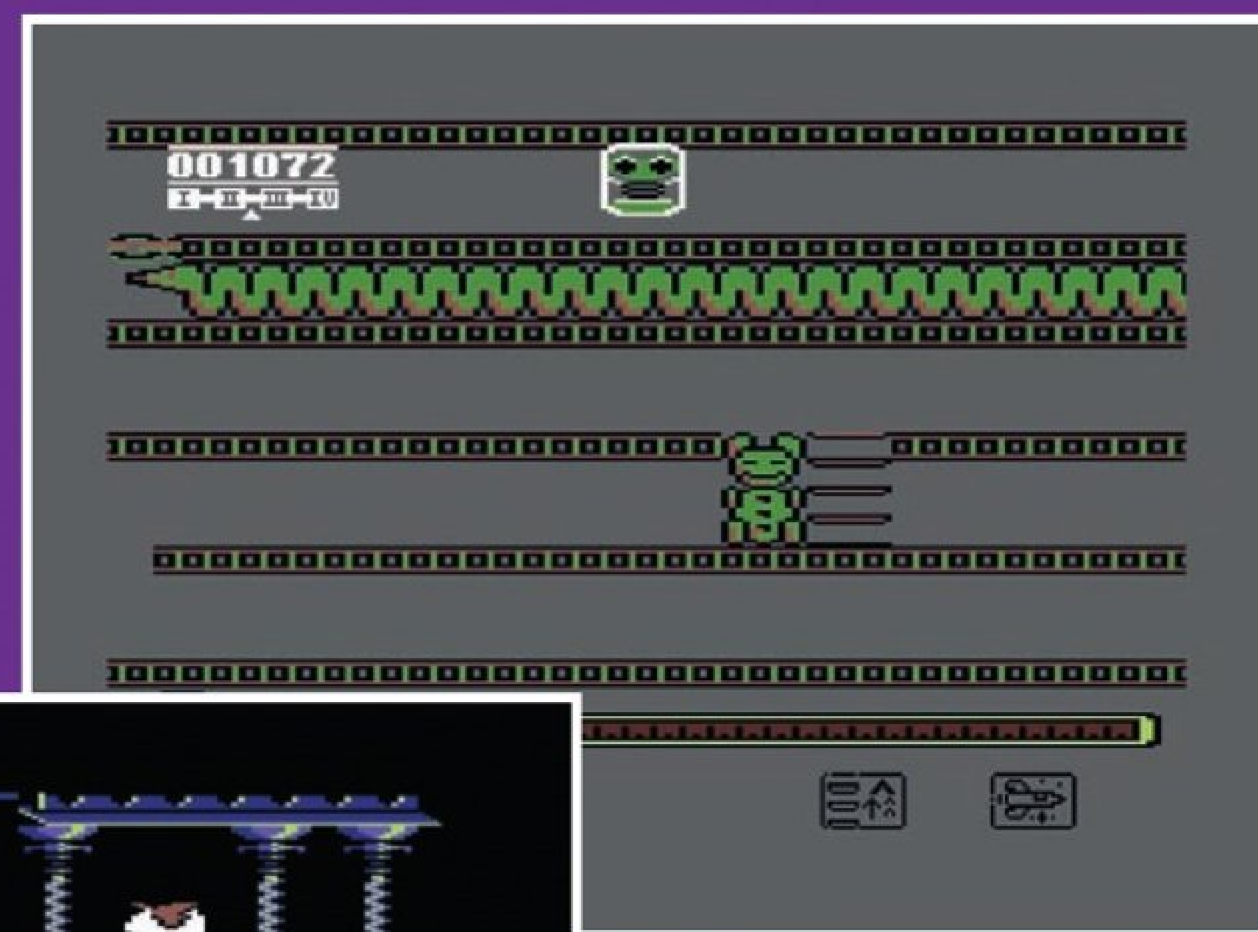
THING BOUNCES BACK

TWO YEARS AFTER Thing valiantly ended the reign of the evil toy goblin, everything went a bit Big Brother. In the 1987 sequel, the goblin's previously unmentioned computer took over, infected a factory and started producing evil toys. Naturally, no oddball green hero could stand by and watch this happen, so Thing bounced into action, exploring the huge factory to recover the disk, tape, ROM and listing paper found in each section.

Although the game is larger in scope and gives Thing some much-needed offensive capabilities, it also retains the original's frustrating elements. It's quite easy to get stuck, costing you the game, not least when you stumble onto a trap that locks off parts of the factory section. We also question the reasoning in gluing a massive red nose to Thing's face. In the game's advert, it calls this an "audible warning device" and says pressing "results in a boing-boing-boing noise". Really, it just made the bouncing hero look less appealing and a bit stupid. Still, the game itself is quite fun, if very tough.

THE MAKING OF





» [C64] The perfect travel solution: squashed into a flying cube that hurtles through the air.



» [C64] *Thing Bounces Back*: the perfect game for the five of you who thought *Thing On A Spring* was a bit too easy.



HOW TO DEFEAT AN EVIL TOY GOBLIN

ALTHOUGH A PLATFORM game by genre, *Thing On A Spring* is also a giant puzzle of sorts. In order to defeat the evil toy goblin, you must locate nine jigsaw puzzle pieces, which, when automatically assembled, will tell Thing how to defeat his foe. But the goblin's not taking any chances, and so he's scattered the jigsaw puzzle pieces throughout his factory – we wonder why he didn't just burn them, but there you go – and summoned evil toys to guard them, and he's also shut down critical components of the building. Therefore, part of Thing's task is also to locate a number of switches, which activate things like the factory's lift, enabling you to travel between its four floors.

Throughout the game, it's essential to keep an eye on Thing's oil level – his life force, essentially – because if that runs dry, it's game over. Oil cans can replenish Thing's health, and it's crucial to ensure that he doesn't collide with too many enemies. In corridors, that's easier said than done, due to the kamikaze nature of the evil toys – our tip: just get through as fast as you can and don't stop for anything – but in the main factory sections, monsters move in predefined patterns and so are more easily avoided.

nightmare to get working, because the enemies had to be aware of where the others were, and ideally negotiate the background." After losing a few days working on the idea, Jason recommended going for simpler movement on the enemies; after some heated debate, this was agreed and coded up in a few hours.

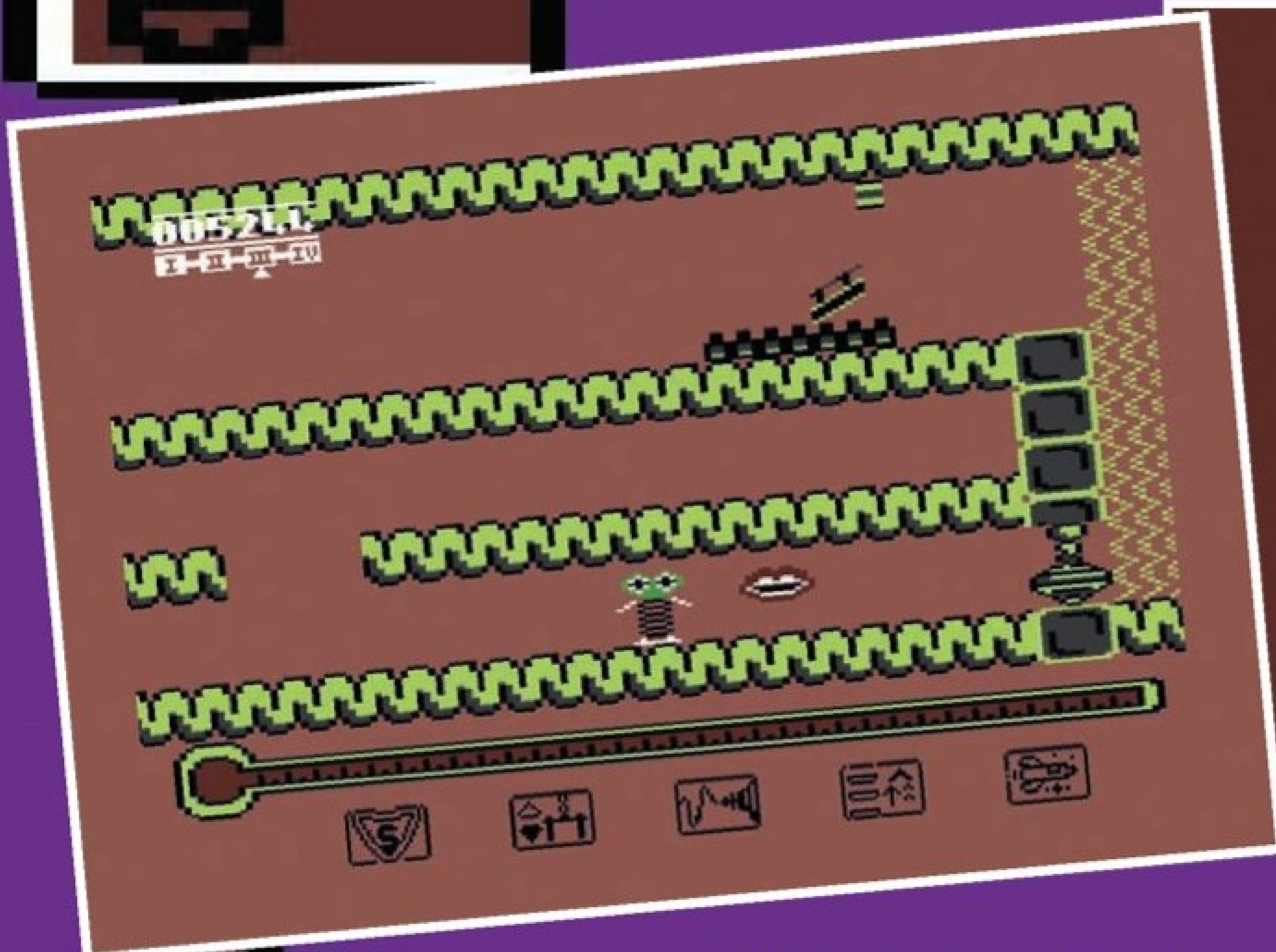
Another aspect of the game that needed a quick resolution was the audio. For previous games by Micro Projects, this hadn't really been a consideration – its C16 titles didn't have soundtracks and the sound effects were done in-house – but the team recognised this wouldn't be good enough for a premium C64 release. Luckily, prior to setting up Micro Projects, Jason had developed and published C64 games under the name Merlin Software, and he'd one day been sent a letter that contained a poorly photocopied flyer with the words 'Do you want great music in your games?' on it.

This was perfect. The person who'd written the flyer, looking for work, was Rob Hubbard, and Jason gave him a call. "He agreed to travel down from Newcastle to Stevenage if we covered his travel expenses, since he was unemployed at the time," says Jason. A few days later, Rob was amazing the Micro Projects team with samples of music and effects he'd created. "We were also very impressed with Rob's coding efforts – his audio player took up very little processor time, which was important, because the scrolling and collision detection was beginning to take up a lot of processing cycles. Plus it was unlikely we'd have time to optimise this code."

Rob was shown the latest version of the game, enjoyed playing it and seemed to like the character. He duly returned to Newcastle to work on some ideas for what was to be one of his first C64 soundtracks. "I'm not sure if it was the first – maybe that was *Action Biker* for Mastertronic," he tells us. "Anyway, *Thing* was based on a demo piece that I wrote to test the music code. After I saw the game, I expanded on the 'spring' idea and didn't do anything too radical!"

Within the week, a floppy disk arrived at Micro Projects, containing a copy of Rob's player and the *Thing On A Spring* theme. Jason duly appended the code to the game and turned up the sound on the monitor. Half an hour later, the code had compiled and the team heard the theme tune for the first time. "It sounded crap," says Jason. The team was shell-shocked and called Rob, someone holding the phone up to the speaker so he could hear the music. "He immediately picked up that it was running at the wrong speed. Without getting too technical, we were running the music at 60Hz and Rob had composed it to run at 50Hz. 'Version 2' rapidly followed in the post, along with some great sound effects, and the rest is history!"

> It sounded crap because we were running the music at 60Hz and Rob had composed it to run at 50Hz





» [C64] Thing mulls on how much simpler his quest would be if that train worked. And if it was armed with lasers.

The soundtrack was complete, but the game was still some way off being finished, and yet the deadline was relentlessly charging towards the feverishly working team. "A few late nights in the office helped to clear some of the backlog but, as Mark switched from level designer to tester, he found a number of bugs in the collision system," recalls Jason. "I didn't really have time to fix all the issues. Mark did his best to design round many of the problems, and the addition of a quit key at least meant a trapped player wouldn't have to reload the game from cassette!"

The six weeks abruptly ended and the Micro Projects team was duly informed that Gremlin production manager/financial director Kevin Norburn was heading to Stevenage to pick up the master. "The 'intense' QA process for this game involved Kevin watching a single playthrough of the game," laughs Jason. "As long as the game could be completed, the plan was for Kevin to dash off to the cassette duplication plant in Birmingham, and 25,000 copies of *Thing On A Spring* would be produced over the next few days." While this may not seem like a rigorous procedure, Jason notes that for the time it was reasonably thorough: "With most of our C16 games, we just sent Gremlin the master and that was it!"

With sweaty palms and a Kempston Pro in his hand, Mark started the playthrough. The team was tired and the thought of another late night was not appealing. "Mark played well, though, avoided the more troublesome areas where he could, and knew all the pixel-perfect bounces, since he'd designed them," remembers Jason. "It was truly great to see the evil goblin get zapped off the screen!"

Kevin grabbed the master and headed north. Micro Projects' work was done, and the team treated itself to a hard-earned curry, despite being a little disappointed with the game. "I can't remember much detail other than we were all unhappy with the way the game turned out, and we thought we could have done better," says Jason. "But a few weeks later, we saw the *Zzap!64* review and Sizzler award and were even more excited to later discover Thing turning up in the magazine's borders!"





DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

MONTY ON THE RUN
(PICTURED)
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC, C16
YEAR: 1985

WAY OF THE TIGER
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC, MSX
YEAR: 1986

JACK THE NIPPER
SYSTEMS: ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMSTRAD CPC, MSX
YEAR: 1986

Future Classic



Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come





INFO

- **Featured System:** Xbox
- **Year Released:** 2002
- **Publisher:** Interplay
- **Developer:** Snowblind Studios/ Black Isle Studios
- **Key People:** Chris Avellone (design), Ezra Dreisbach (lead and engine programmer), Ryan Geithman (design)

GO DEEPER

- **A Dreamcast port of the original *Baldur's Gate* was planned, but scrapped.**
- **The Xbox and GameCube versions, released later, received additional tweaks and technical upgrades over the PS2 edition.**

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE

19.

Instead of attempting to squash the classic PC games onto a console, Snowblind Studios found a middle-ground between the original Baldur's Gate and a high-end take on the well-worn Gauntlet template

THE BACKGROUND

Following some harsh financial results in 1999, Interplay began to switch its focus to the new generation of consoles. In November of 2000, a spokesperson for the publish stated that the recently-released and critically acclaimed PC RPG *Baldur's Gate II* was headed for the PlayStation 2, though rather than being a straightforward port of the game, it was explained that this version would probably be tailored towards the console market and the original game adjusted accordingly. At some point during development, though, the idea of porting *Baldur's Gate II* at all was jettisoned in favour of something that would only retain the franchise name, and in February of 2001 the all-new *Dark Alliance* was announced.

The intention was to base the gameplay on the third iteration of the *Dungeons & Dragons* ruleset (although the finished product had only a loose relationship with it). Interplay's RPG specialist Black Isle would collaborate on this new title with Snowblind Studios, the aim being to develop a game that fans of both roleplaying and action games could enjoy, with spells never before seen in the series incorporated to ramp up the action of the eventual product. The released game would sell over 500,000 copies on PS2 alone, a surprise hit in an extremely busy year for console releases – ports for the Xbox and GameCube came much later down the line, paving the way for a sequel in 2004.

THE GAME

By the time the PS2 was launched onto the market, Japanese RPGs were a dominant force on consoles, with the Western equivalent games tending to find a home mainly on PCs. With that in mind, *Dark Alliance* felt like a reactionary game to that trend – a way to attract not necessarily a casual audience, but one that perhaps wouldn't have found its way to a Western-styled adventure game otherwise. It retained the spirit and tone of the PC *Baldur's Gate* titles, but crafted everything else, including combat, environments and menu screens, around the idea of couch-friendly burst play, foregoing turn-based point-and-click play for battering the face off of giants in real-time with a +3 sword.

With a choice of three different classes – an elven witch, a warrior dwarf and a long-range human archer – *Dark Alliance* fostered genuine

Things of note











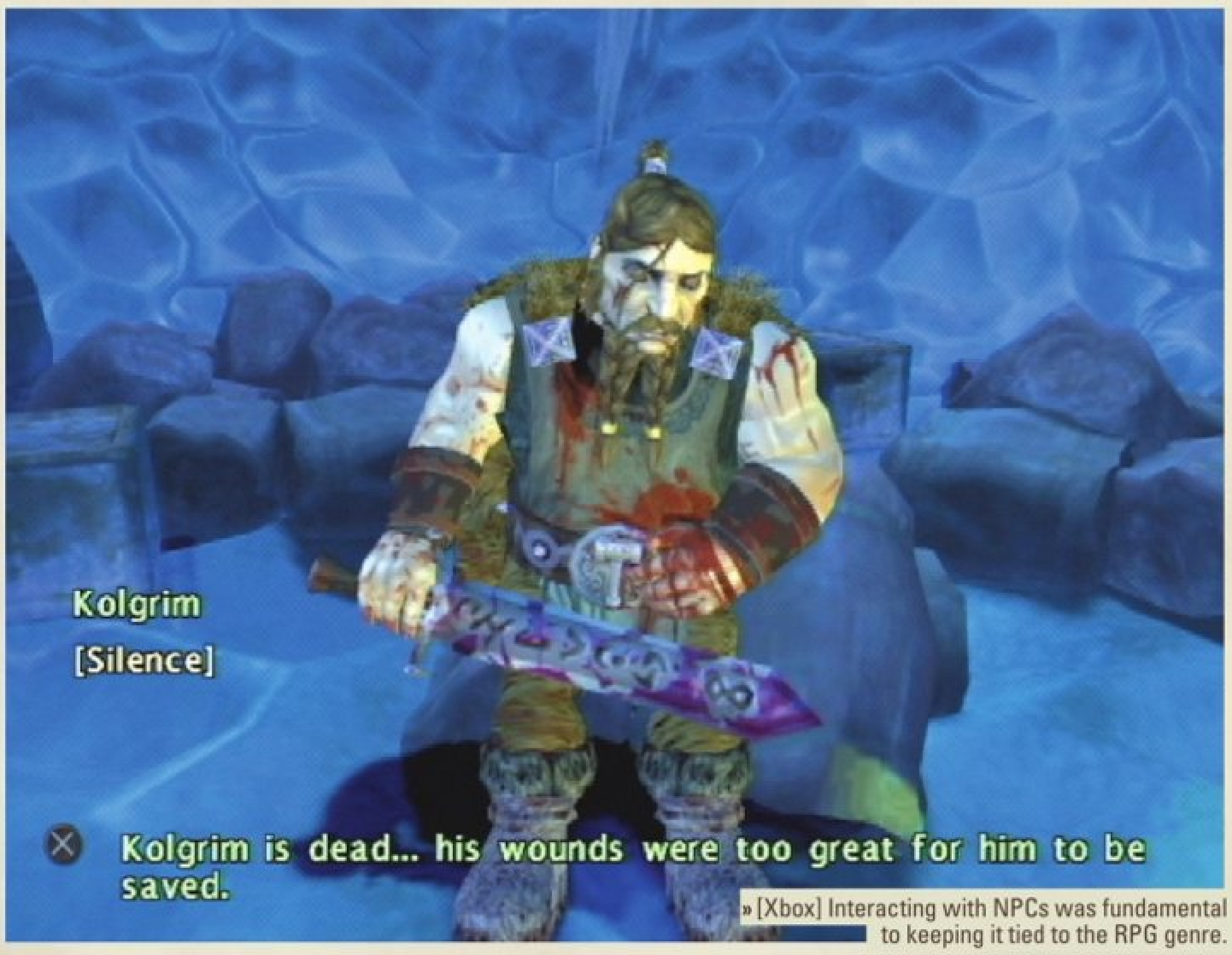
Lost glory
Last year's *The Lord Of The Rings: War In The North* did a disappointing job of recapturing *Dark Alliance*'s feel, squandering the licence instead of building on it.

By name alone
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance takes place in the Western Heartlands of the *D&D* universe, with no real crossover in locations between it and the PC *Baldur's Gate* titles.

Return to the Forgotten Realms
Dark Alliance II didn't boast a huge number of changes from the first game, besides graphical upgrades, and subsequently received a bit less acclaim than the original.

Journey for two
Co-op adds to *Dark Alliance*'s longevity. The entire game can be tackled with two people, tapping into the *Gauntlet* mentality on consoles when no other such titles existed.

Legacy of the co-op RPG
The age of Xbox Live Arcade and PSN has given life to the *Dark Alliance*-style action-RPGs – *Torchlight* is a nice alternative for gamers demanding a modern spin.



» [Xbox] Interacting with NPCs was fundamental to keeping it tied to the RPG genre.



» [Xbox] Giants and dragons were two of the game's more visually impressive boss battles.



What the press thought

XBM
Score: 8.5/10
"It lacks the depth of a title like *Morrowind* but there is enough in the game to make it an enjoyable game to play."



IGN
Score: 8.5/10
"Yes, the quest is fairly linear, but it's also a lengthy, engaging game that will surely eat up your days."

strategy, with each character having to tackle groups of enemies at a varying pace depending on their advantages in battle. Despite being fashioned for a more mainstream player, *Dark Alliance* wasn't dumbed down, challenging players to master its rich customisation options in order to progress through extremely tough levels and powerful boss encounters. This micro-management guaranteed that some trappings of the roleplaying genre had successfully made the leap to consoles.

The presentation of *Dark Alliance* remains astounding, with varied, full 3D environments that advanced far beyond the relatively low-fi look of the PC titles. The realistic animations on the game's spider creatures are particularly creepy, but coupled with the highly detailed enemy designs, *Dark Alliance* didn't suffer from the same level of repetition as some hack-and-slash titles. This made the most of *Dungeons & Dragons'* vast mythology, with a real sense of a journey as you charged through dungeons, ice caves and dark towers, often with unexpected foes around the corner (*Dark Alliance*'s epic-sized and deadly Ice Dragon is particularly memorable). The heavy bloodshed in the game, too, is oddly enjoyable, another touch that adds to the suitably mature take on this dark fantasy universe.



Today, we see even the most traditional RPG developers shaping their games to suit console players, and *Dark Alliance* was in many ways a prelude to that – understanding how some of the complexity of a PC game can make its way to a console, while also keeping the presentation fresh and exciting, this was a blockbuster take on *Baldur's Gate* that turned out be as valid as that of its computer-based cousin. With two players, of course, the game peaks as a gloriously-rendered update of the co-op dungeon crawler, and the balancing of the three classes in *Dark Alliance* resulted in a compulsive and replayable adventure.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

Dark Alliance represented a rare, forward-thinking method of pleasing *Dungeons & Dragons* fans who perhaps didn't think PC games based on the property could translate effectively to the home console; it was something different to anything the series was renowned for, but an experience equally as rich in its own terms.

On top of that, this is still a purely satisfying hack-and-slash adventure, capturing the breadth of the licence's fictional universe, which offers an atmospheric backdrop to this updated take on well-worn gameplay mechanics. *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* didn't exactly do anything new, then, yet it refined a timeless genre using the *D&D* property, as well as drawing on the Black Isle team's experience with RPGs to make it a distinctive companion piece to the PC titles.

We're now seeing more PC-style RPGs transferring, as is, to modern consoles, and while this is occasionally very effective with games like *Skyrim*, the way that *Dark Alliance* was specifically created to fill the void between the action genre and RPG meant that it absolutely worked as the kind of game you'd play in front of the telly.



In the chair with...

ERIC CHAHI

With Another World now more than 20 years old and recently released on iOS, David Crookes met up with its creator, Éric Chahi, to chat about his career and future ambitions, discovering just why there won't be a sequel to the game and why publishers should cross him at their peril

A KEEN PHOTOGRAPHER, ERIC CHAHI became a videogame developer in 1983 when he produced *Frog* for the Oric-1, following it up with *Carnaval*, *Le Sceptre D'Anubis* and *Doggy*. Although his break came with Loriciels, it was not until he moved to Delphine Software in 1989 that his true success began. He came up with the idea for *Another World* and made the project his own, writing the game, producing the graphics, and even drawing the box art. So successful was the game that even *Metal Gear* creator Hideo Kojima cited it as one of the five games that most influenced him.

RETRO GAMER: What games inspired you when you were growing up?
ERIC CHAHI: Videogames or games in general? I think if we are talking about all of the different types of games then I would say Lego. I spent so many hours playing with it when I was a child. It was a wonderful toy. Very creative.

RG: Did you play many videogames in your early years?
EC: The first videogame I played was a two-player game that involved a star and a ship, and you had to destroy each other. It was called *Spacewar!*, I think, and I would play this in the arcade, putting in lots of money and really loving it. It was like the same technology that was used in *Asteroids*, but it was out before then.

RG: Did that get you into gaming?
EC: I would say the big shift for me came in 1980 or 1981. Suddenly there were all of these colourful arcade stations with some amazing games, and I enjoyed playing them all. I remember spending ages with *Pac-Man*, *Galaxian*, *Battlezone*, *Tron* and *Galaga*. Each summer we went to the coast and we played with many of these types of games. I wouldn't say I was always very good at them. Sometimes they were very hard to play and I would have problems with them.

RG: What was it that caught your imagination?
EC: I think it was the feeling that I had when I pressed a button and I could see a ship or a character moving. I could explore and shoot and feel like I was in some sort of control. It was a pleasure to interact with a creature on the screen. I was watching these television screens and seeing such colourful pictures. It was very new and it was a revolution for me.

RG: Did you pester your parents for a computer?
EC: I didn't realise that you could use a computer to create a game until I went on a programming course at school. The maths teacher enjoyed computing and she put lessons on every lunchtime on a ZX81. That was the first machine I ever programmed on, but I wrote more serious software than gaming. It captured my imagination. At that time a friend of my parents had bought a computer, an Oric-1. I realised that you could create good games with this computer and so when I was 16 – this was in 1983 – I bought my own Oric computer in the summer. I had some savings that I had accumulated for a long time and it was all spent on this computer. My parents bought me a small television.

RG: Did you write your first game on the Oric-1?
EC: I did. I produced a game in BASIC. It was the first piece of programming I did on the Oric and it took me two weeks. It was called *Frog* and the player had to eat insects. The frog had a large tongue and he had to launch it to catch the flies but not the wasps, because they would kill the frog. He would explode. It was very simple.

RG: Your next game was made shortly afterwards, wasn't it?



SELECTED TIMELINE

Frog 1983
Carnaval 1983
Le Sceptre D'Anubis 1984
Doggy 1984
Infernal Runner 1985
Le Pacte 1986
Journey To The Center Of The Earth 1988
Joan Of Arc: Siege And The Sword 1989
Future Wars 1990
Another World 1991
Heart Of Darkness 1998
From Dust 2011

"I started to lose confidence. I felt uncomfortable with my ability to create a game alone"

In the chair with...

EC: Two weeks later I made a game called *Carnaval*; it was a clone of another game called *Carnival*. A friend of my parents was working for a publishing company, which made books about learning French, and he understood publishing. He said I should show my game to a publisher for games and that I should try the importer of the Oric computer. Maybe they want to publish it. I went with my parents with my tape and showed them, and they called me two days later. They said they played the games and they liked them. I could be paid in money or with hardware like a printer and a joypad. I said I want the printer and the joypad.

RG: You must have been proud that your games had been released…

EC: I did not even get a copy of the game when it was published. I remember it had no cover, just a tape. I went to a fair a few years later and one of the prizes on one of the stalls was my game. [laughs] They probably got some cheap copies of it to give away.

RG: So you caught the programming bug?

EC: I produced a few more games. In 1984 I wrote *Doggy* and *Le Sceptre D'Anubis*, an Egyptian adventure game. The player would explore an Egyptian pyramid and they would have to type in text. I wanted Loriciels to publish the game, which I wrote in BASIC, but when I took it to them they did not want it. Loriciels was a big publisher at the time – the biggest in France – and I really wanted them to take the game. But there was a problem. Another adventure game came out on the day I went to see Loriciels called *L'Aigle D'Or*, and it was much better than mine. Loriciels only wanted a game that could beat it and I couldn't. My game was taken by Micro Programmes 5. Loriciels published *Doggy*, though.

RG: Was that a relief?

EC: Yes, it was. I had written the game in 6502 assembler and it

* FIVE TO PLAY

ANOTHER WORLD



HAVING NOT CREATED a truly original game since 1986 – his last being *Le Pacte*, before he went to work as a graphic designer on *Journey To The Center Of The Earth*, *Joan Of Arc* and *Future Wars* – Chahi had a burning desire to create his own project. Taken aback by the animation and graphics of *Dragon's Lair*, he decided to draw upon his love of science fiction, producing a side-scrolling adventure using an Amiga 500, a camcorder to create the animations for the rotoscoping, and Deluxe Paint for the art. The result was a much-ported masterpiece that, despite not having had the benefit of testers, quickly gained cult status in spite of its quirks. Gamers fell in love with an ambitious, cinematic, stylish game that combined cut-scenes with a strong narrative that put the player in the role of an actor, which was a major innovative achievement. Longer and more polished versions surfaced on the PC, Mac, SNES, Mega Drive, 3DO, Mega-CD and even the GBA, albeit some 13 years later and unofficially. The game was recently released for the Apple iOS format.

FROG



AS THE FIRST game he ever wrote, *Frog* was certainly no 'croak'. It was written in BASIC for the Oric and the premise was simple enough: players had to catch as many insects as possible using the frog's huge tongue, taking care to avoid the wasps, which proved fatal if swallowed. It was a race against time – or, at the very least, a falling energy level. As you might expect, the graphics were poor and yet the gameplay showed a good level of inventiveness, with a simple control system in which you moved vertically and hammered the space bar. It was enough for Chahi to turn the head of a publisher, and that set off a chain of events that led to his career in gaming.

LE PACTE



MOVING AWAY FROM producing simple games, Chahi wanted to invoke emotion in a player, and he did it by producing *Le Pacte*. He says he was inspired by *The Amityville Horror*, and it certainly has a foreboding, chilling air to it. The text interface didn't work as well as he would have hoped, and yet the game had some neat touches, not least the spiritual séances and dreams that formed the in-game help, and the concept of taking photographs in order to discover a demonic presence in a room. Packaged in an all-black box, the game's marketing suffered because it didn't have any screenshots on the back, although that was later rectified with the use of some stickers.

HEART OF DARKNESS



ALREADY EXHAUSTED FROM having made *Another World*, Chahi had considered taking his career in a fresh direction until he decided to press ahead with the game that became *Heart Of Darkness*. His organic approach to making *Another World* continued with this new game, making the development a long, drawn-out affair. *Another World* had been released in 1991, but it was another seven years until *Heart Of Darkness* saw the light of day. Frequent delays, a lukewarm response from reviewers and general tiredness of gaming led Chahi to focus on his other passions of travel and photography, and he took a very long break from gaming.

FROM DUST



AT E3 2010, *From Dust* was announced by Ubisoft. Eric Chahi was unveiled as the creative designer. Fresh from his travels, Chahi had been inspired and he started to create a simulated volcano, later building an entire game around it. *From Dust* feels as if it has benefited from Chahi's years away from the industry. His travel experience comes through in the way the game celebrates and plays on the great outdoors. It's a natural god sim that uses up a lot of computational power in producing changing terrain and fluid movement. Having been well-received and with good sales, it appears that this developer is back on the gaming map.

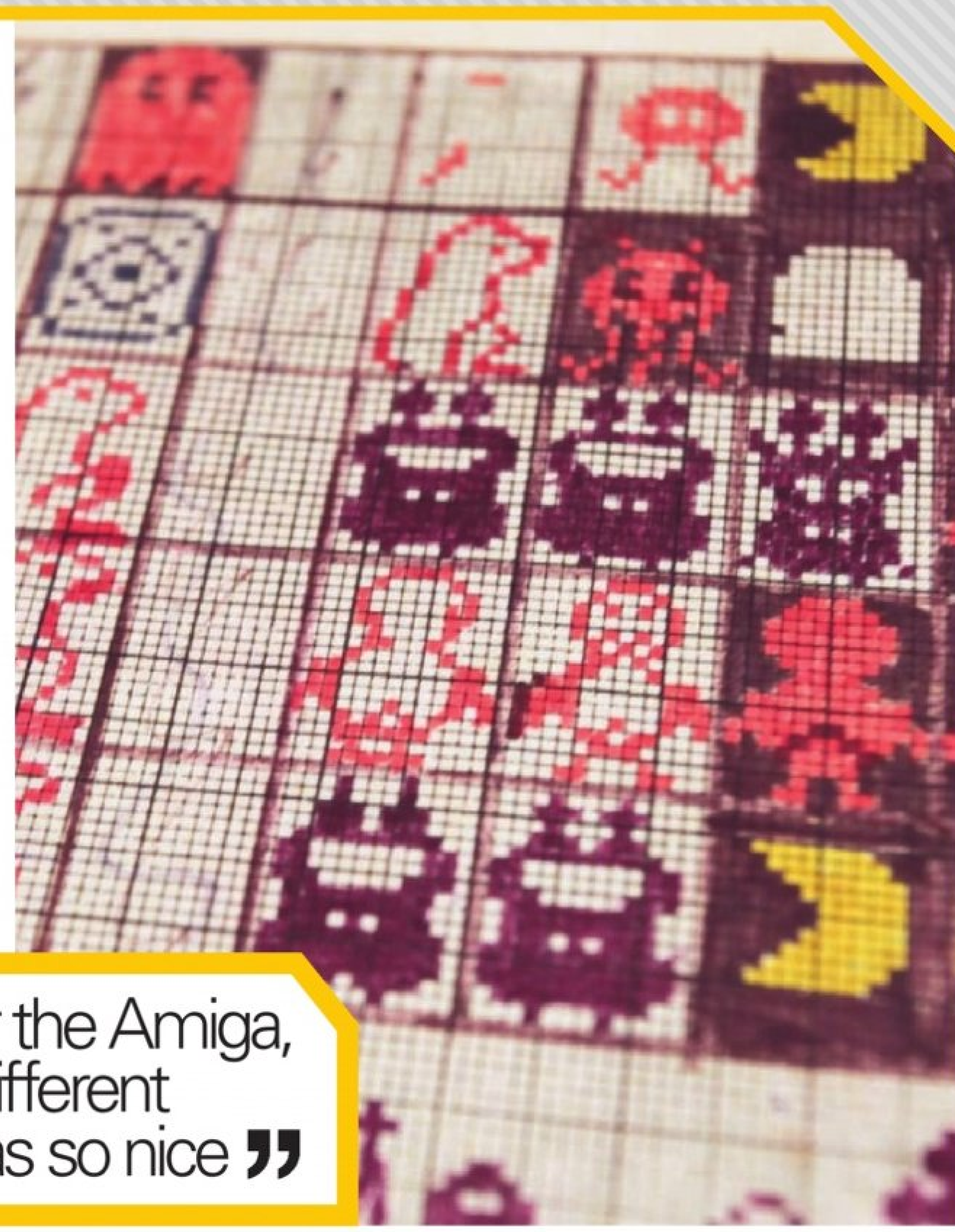
was a good game. It had horizontal scrolling and I mixed redefined text characters with pure bitmaps. I had been learning assembly language. Loriciels took my next game too: *Le Pacte*. It was another adventure game and it was the first time I tried to produce a mood in the game. You had to investigate a house and what is happening, taking an object and finding spirits. This game was very special for me.

RG: What influenced you when making *Le Pacte*?
EC: *Amityville*, the movie. I really wanted to express emotion and there was a lot of atmosphere in the game. It had a limited choice of a verb and a noun. The player had to choose from two lists. I think there were too many words. I did like my idea of having the player with a camera and you could take a picture of a spirit. You could look at the photograph and check if the spirit was a demon, and you could then try and destroy it. I also used the algorithms from *Game Of Life*. Loriciels was really excited about the game. The box was like a blackboard with blood on it, and they tried to do something different. But there were no photos on the back of the package so the player did not know how it looked. The publisher realised it was not a good idea, so it made some stickers with screenshots and put it on the back. The game did well, but it was not very successful.

RG: You were 18 years old when you made *Le Pacte*. Did you feel you were then old enough to go into creating games full-time?
EC: It was during the time I was making *Le Pacte* that I decided I wanted to stop my studies and produce videogames. It was time for me and I was earning some money. I was not earning a lot of money, but I thought it could be enough to live on. I made the choice to leave studying when I was 18. It disturbed my parents because I stopped before I went to university. That was a shame for them, but I had to prove to them that I could make money with my creations. When you are 18, you can make those kinds of decisions. I think back and I can see that I had been waiting until then to avoid conflict. It was my decision.

RG: After *Le Pacte*, were you given more freedom to choose your next game?
EC: I moved on to a very ambitious project. I wanted to create a game generator, so the user would say they wanted an arcade game with a certain fun variant and the generator would create a game. I started to work on an engine, but it was too big and I didn't have enough skill to create a project like that. After a year I decided to cancel it. But I started to lose confidence. I felt uncomfortable with my ability to create a game alone.

RG: You then made the move into 16-bit computing. Was that a big jump for you, then?
EC: I created art for *Jeanne D'Arc* and *Voyage Au Centre De La Terre*. They were published by a company called Chip. I was contacted by some people who worked at Loriciels and they were producing a new game. They wanted me to work as a programmer but I said no. I wanted to do graphics and they said that was okay, so that's what I did for a year with Chip. I had to leave, though, because the company was having financial difficulties and they were not paying people. I didn't like the work I was doing either so I left. But I realised that the Amiga 500 was a wonderful computer, and it had so many colours. I enjoyed creating art more than I did programming.



> “I would prefer the Amiga, looking back at different computers. It was so nice”

RG: What if games hadn't existed? Do you think you'd have become an artist?
EC: Today, if I was not in games, I would do animations. I had another ambition as a teenager to create stop-motion animation films. I would sometimes create movies. If videogames didn't exist, I would probably be doing that.

RG: So where did you go next?
EC: There was a new company called Delphine Software, which had just published a new game by Paul Cuisset called *Bio Challenge*. Paul was looking for a graphic animator for his next game, which was *Future Wars*, so I went to Delphine. It was a big company – a record company. They published a lot of easy listening classical music and they had a lot of money, but they had decided to go into gaming and they wanted to find some talent. I noticed straight away that they trusted people who worked for them too. *Bio Challenge* had been a great success and they had high expectations for *Future Wars*.

RG: What was your meeting with Paul Cuisset like?
EC: The first time I met Paul, he was unsure about me. He was not sure about my work. On the Amiga I had retouched images that had been scanned, but he wanted to see more so I worked hard for two or three weeks to create the best pictures I could do at the time, and then I created an animation with a small character moving towards a ship. And he said he wanted to work with me. That was the beginning of a new era for me. The success of *Future Wars* was very nice, and it gave me some time to create something on my own without any pressure.

RG: Was it hard leaving the 8-bit generation well and truly behind?
EC: Well, after the Oric, when I got my first bit of money I bought an Apple II. I knew many people with it and they loved the computer. I played many games on it. There was a good diversity of games – arcade, adventure, puzzle and so on. Games like *Karateka* and *Lode Runner* really inspired me. It was an incredible computer for gaming for me.

RG: It wasn't the most popular machine in France, though, was it?
EC: No. The Spectrum and Commodore were popular in the UK, but in France it was the Oric and Amstrad CPC. I loved that machine but I preferred the Motorola processor to the Z80, which I felt was too complex. It didn't have the same elegance. The Amiga had Motorola. I would prefer the Commodore Amiga, looking back at different computers. It was so nice.

RG: What did you do at the time, other than play and create games?
EC: Well, I was fascinated by science fiction and the universe. I've always been interested in those. I saw *Star Wars* when I was ten years old and it inspired me. I was totally blown away by this movie. Before this I was interested in science fiction, but *Star*

*NUMBER CRUNCHING

1,000,000: The number of copies sold of *Another World*

20: The number of years that have passed since *Another World* made its debut

18: The age at which Chahi left education

9: The number of games he originated

13: The number of years between the release of *Heart Of Darkness* and *From Dust*

1: The number of games he says were easy to make: *Future Wars*

7: The number of years *From Dust* had been in the works, Chahi having started the design in 2004

1: Lovecraft-inspired RPG, later abandoned





» A colour sketch of *Another World* by Eric Chahi, showing off his artistic skills to the max.

Wars showed me it was possible to make imaginary but believable universes. So I focused on this movie and science fiction for many years. I was totally passionate about fantasy illustration and creation.

RG: And so to the big one: *Another World*, or *Out Of This World* as it was called in America. Your defining moment…

EC: It's a massive game. There is no score. It is visual and it has a large universe; it was unique in that respect. At the time it was traditional to have a score. There is a cinematic feeling to the game, and players felt they were leaving their life and becoming involved in a story, living the life of this other person or character. *Another World* had good storytelling.

RG: There were a lot of groundbreaking features in the game. How did they come about?

EC: It was a chance for me to try some nice techniques. One of them was rotoscoping, which worked like in *Karateka*. I used myself for the animation work and it made the main character more lifelike. I put a lot of effort into the look of the game. I wrote the graphic engine in assembly language while the polygons tool was coded in GFA BASIC. I decided to use polygons because it allowed me to create large graphics in a small amount of memory. I got a good frame rate of around 20 frames a second. The Amiga had something called genlock, which let me produce rotoscoped animations using polygons.

RG: So it's fair to say that *Karateka* inspired you greatly?

EC: I loved it on the Apple II. The narrative was simple but effective, and very new at the time. It had an incredible cinematic feeling. *Dragon's Lair* also inspired me. It influenced me to use polygonal technology. It had a bigger character, and it showed me that polygons could do the same as pixels with less memory. They didn't use polygons in *Dragon's Lair* – they used compressed bitmaps – but it gave me the idea and I thought I could extend their use to the game itself.

RG: You modelled Lester on yourself in the game, but you felt disturbed by it, didn't you?

EC: Yes, it was strange having something that was supposed to look like me in the game, so I changed the hair to red. Red hair was also interesting to make the hero pop out from the background.

> "It was strange having something that was supposed to look like me in the game, so I changed the hair to red"

RG: Is it true that you had a fax war with Delphine's American publisher, Interplay?

EC: I did. Interplay wanted to change the introduction music to the game. I was very angry and I wanted to keep my own music, so we had a bit of a fight. We were exchanging faxes and it was this big fight by fax. I thought my music was fine, so I sent an infinite fax, which is a long strip of paper where the beginning is stuck to the end using an adhesive strip, such that it loops around the fax machine endlessly. It kept repeating the words 'keep the original intro music'. Of course, I sent this when it was night in Los Angeles, so you can imagine their surprise when they arrived at work in the morning and found reams of paper repeating this message. This didn't help, and they didn't change their mind until Delphine got involved and said that legally they had no right to impose their choice of music.

RG: How did you produce *Another World*?

EC: Mainly on screen. The whole game creation was chronological. It was an improvisation process where the story and the game were built progressively. At the end of each level, I didn't know how it would continue before doing it. The main idea was to communicate the pacing of a movie to the player and immerse him in a believing universe without extra information like score on screen. It is something that *Another World* has in common with *Heart Of Darkness*. For *Another World*, it was more of a process where I started to create the tool and the engine to draw it and to play it, and then I used this engine and the whole game mechanic was built progressively.

RG: The game was even ported to consoles. Was that exciting at the time?

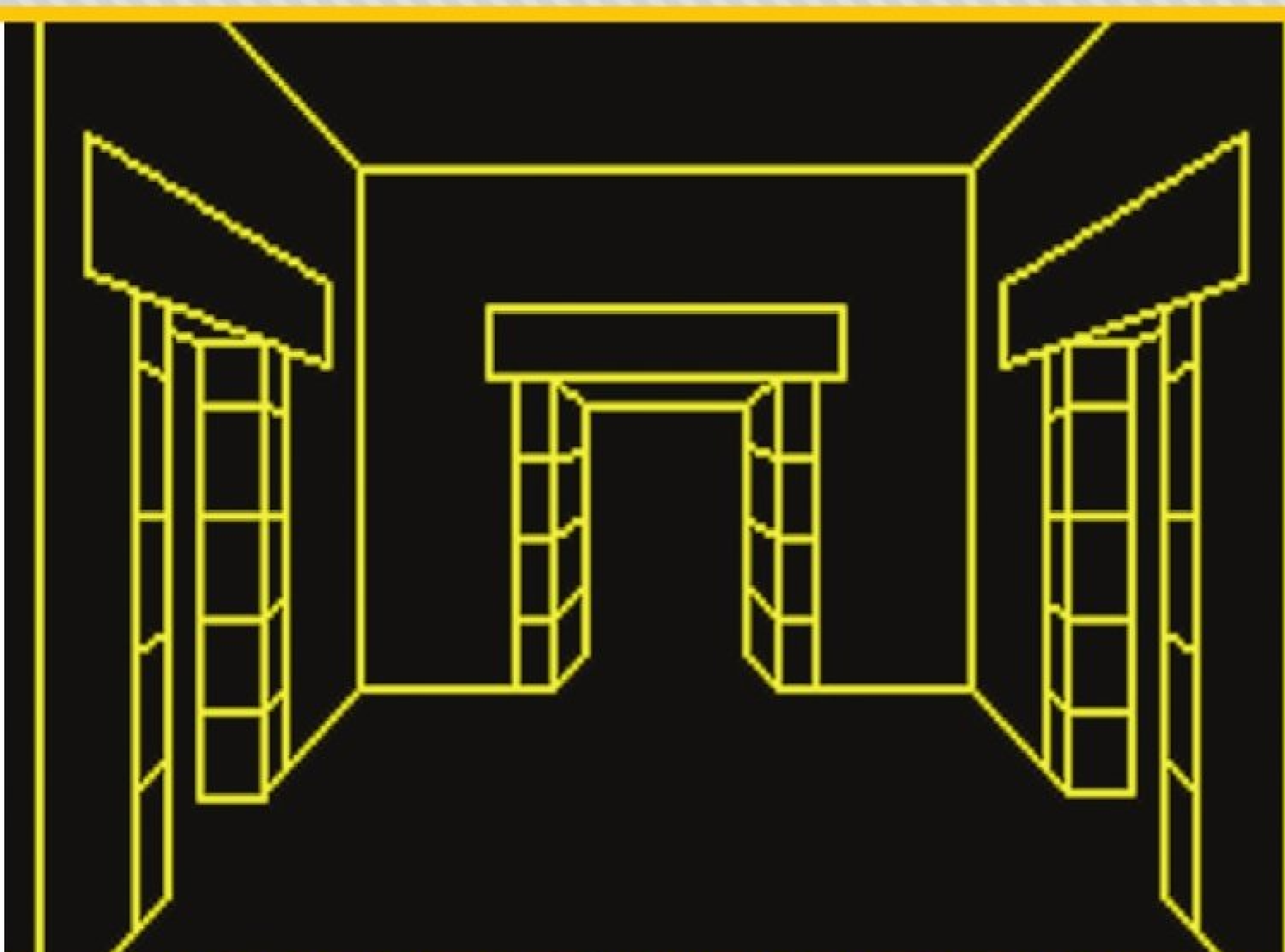
EC: When it went on console, that was something incredible for me.

RG: So were you pleased with the response to *Another World*?

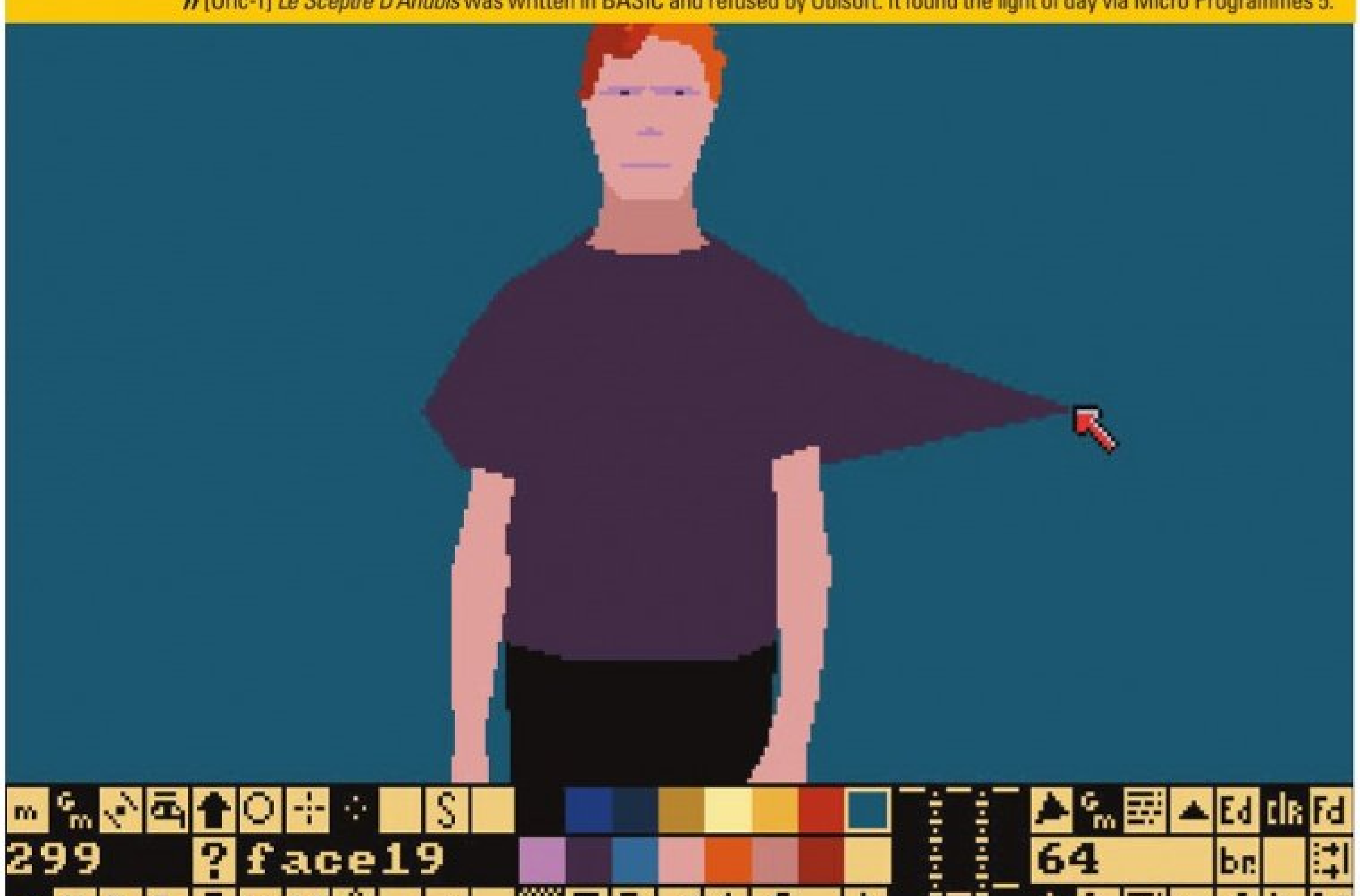
EC: *Another World* was a big commercial success and it was a great time for me. But I have to say that when someone has success, it is disturbing. People want to meet you and some people want to create with you. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but I had a lot of pressure to create something else, so I decided I should take a break. And so it's like being on a train that was going faster. It was not easy because I had a feeling I wasn't controlling things.

RG: Did you become torn between staying in gaming or leaving?

EC: I did. I didn't know whether I should go into illustration or remain in games. But I was convinced that gaming was where my future was. I looked at the success of *Another World*, and so we went to *Heart Of*



» [Oric-1] *Le Sceptre D'Anubis* was written in BASIC and refused by Ubisoft. It found the light of day via Micro Programmes 5.



» [Amiga] *Another World*'s graphics were produced on the Amiga using Deluxe Paint and represented a major triumph.



» [Oric-1] *Carnaval* was one of Chahi's earliest games, produced when he was a teenager finding his feet in videogaming.

Darkness. But it took a long time to make, and after all these years I wanted to take a break.

RG: Would you ever go back and produce an up-to-date version of *Another World* or a sequel?
EC: I prefer to keep the game as it is and focus on new game creations. *Another World* came out 20 years ago and I want to preserve it as it is. Now I want to work on more systematic games, and a remake would take up a lot of energy.

RG: Is there anything you would change about *Another World*?
EC: It is a tricky question. Yes, I would like to change the difficulty, for example. But on the other hand, it is a piece of Nineties gaming. I don't want to change it too much.

RG: How is the new Jaguar version progressing and have you seen it since granting permission?
EC: It's such a crazy thing. It should be released soon, I hope. They want to burn it to a real cartridge and the amazing thing is that there are people who are so passionate to do this. I met them two or three years ago and they asked if we could do it. I said yes, yes. They can't do it full-time so they are doing it sporadically. One day recently they contacted me again and said it was finished. I said of course they could distribute it. They want to meet me again. We didn't make a Jaguar version, so it's nice to see.

RG: *Heart Of Darkness* was a bit of a nightmare project for you in terms of the length of time it took to make. Why was that?
EC: The gameplay just took a long time. The story, characters and cinematic approach were almost done in 1995. The level design was done too at that time, but the gameplay was not coded yet. Indeed, we had the first level produced around 1993, but all that was was a character on a background. We had all the game engine for graphics and for collision detection and character animations, but it wasn't gameplay. Coding in C was difficult too. I was hoping the whole game could be programmed in C, which I didn't do with *Another World*. I thought C would be better, but it posed problems, especially with compiling time. So we created a scripting language in the same way as in *Another World*, to iterate quickly. Once we had the right tool, we finalised the game in about a year.

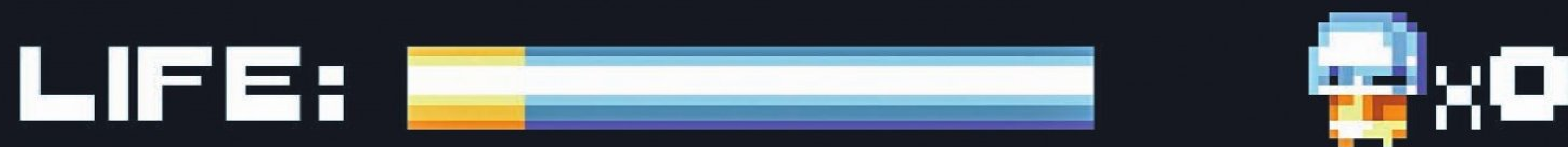
RG: Following *Heart Of Darkness*' release in 1998, you decided to leave gaming and concentrate on photography and painting. Were you just fed up?
EC: I needed a break. I wanted to do something different. But then, in 2004, the desire to create a game came back, the industry was starting to change positively with the internet, and I had many ideas waiting in my notebooks that I wanted to become real. I've started to work on these. At the same time, the idea came in 2005 to produce a mobile phone version of *Another World* and so I worked with Magic Productions on that. In 2006 I contacted Ubisoft to present them with *From Dust*.

RG: How different was it working on *From Dust*? Has the industry moved on a lot?
EC: Working with a team is different from creating a game alone. It is powerful, but I have to adapt to this. You have to make sure that the team understand where you want to go and it must become their project too. Sometimes I prefer to abandon some idea in favour of a team idea to make sure they put their soul in it. The *From Dust* team was fantastic in many aspects for this. It was different in other ways too. Working with a big publisher brings extra pressure, especially about marketing, and you have to convince people all the time. There is another big difference regarding the development itself. *From Dust* is highly systemic. It's a simulation. There is a lot more freedom for the player; that was very new and exciting. It is a kind of gameplay totally different from in *Another World*, which was very scripted. In *From Dust* I learned a lot to create a game with emergence in the game system.

RG: What is your proudest moment in gaming?
EC: As a gamer, finishing the game *Datastorm* on the Amiga.

RG: Do you have any regrets?
EC: Not really. I've been very lucky. Well, maybe the length of the development of *Heart Of Darkness*, which could have been shorter by taking the right decisions sooner.

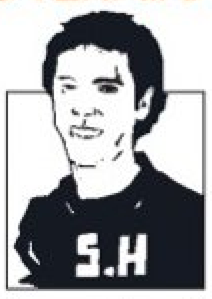
RG: What do you hope to do next?
EC: It is too soon to talk precisely about it. It will be a game more in the way I did it in the Nineties. I mean regarding the development process – be alone, follow my feeling and be in a tight iteration between design and code. The subject will be different; I'm very excited to create a systemic game again!



RoboCop Versus The Terminator

ARRESTING TERMINATOR ACTION

» RETROREVIVAL



» MEGA DRIVE
» VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
» 1994

As a kid with very little disposable income, deciding which game to buy could be a drawn out process. I remember visiting my local game store one day and agonising over the following decision: should I drop some Christmas money on a copy of *Disney's Aladdin* or take a punt on this instead? Either way, Virgin Interactive was getting a sale that day.

In the end, it was the chance to see two robotic cinema heavyweights share television space that won out, and though I would later come to realise *Aladdin* was the much better of the two games, in terms of an action movie crossover *Robocop Versus The Terminator* still proved to be a lot of fun.

Loosely based on the comic book series published by Dark Horse Comics, the game adaptation saw you assume the role of Robocop, who, after learning a bit of him went into the creation of Skynet, sets out to singlehandedly destroy it as he feels partially responsible for its subsequent human-culling actions.

Set in a post apocalyptic future, Mecha Murphy starts off in Detroit, cleaning its streets of armed criminals, while rescuing hostages and vandalising surveillance cameras. It doesn't take long though, before he's taking on his old foes, like bipedal growling tank ED-209 and druggy droid Cain, as well as a team of Terminators that have been sent back from the future to stamp out the last embers of the resistance.

Staying true to its 18-cert movie heritage, *RoboCop Versus The Terminator* was notorious for its comic book violence and gore. But most refreshing was the fact that this RoboCop didn't animate like a skip full of Seventies gym equipment. Indeed, unlike his live-action counterpart this Robo could jump, climb ladders and even shimmy across telephone lines. Considering his heaviness it was a bit silly, but his newfound agility did allow for some slightly more interesting level design than your average *RoboCop* game.

With nicely detailed visuals that captured the look of the movies perfectly, hilariously silly music, and gore by the bucket-load, *Robocop Versus The Terminator* is every bit as silly and entertaining as the movies it's inspired by. *




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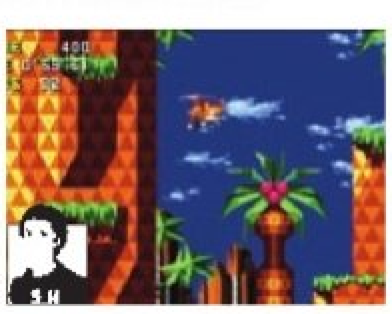


>> It's a relatively quiet month for games, but there are still titles worth shouting about. BluePoint Games finally unleashes its excellent remaster of some of Konami's best Metal Gear Solid games, while Sega delivers an impressive update of Sonic CD…

PICKS OF THE MONTH



DARRAN
Metal Gear HD Collection
An excellent remaster that proves that you can teach an old snake new tricks.



STUART
Sonic CD
Another superb digital update from Sega that *Sonic* fans will absolutely adore.



DAVID
Grand Theft Auto III
The controls let it down at times, but this remains an impressive port.

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

BLUEPOINT GAMES GIVES SNAKE A HIGH-DEFINITION MAKEOVER

INFORMATION

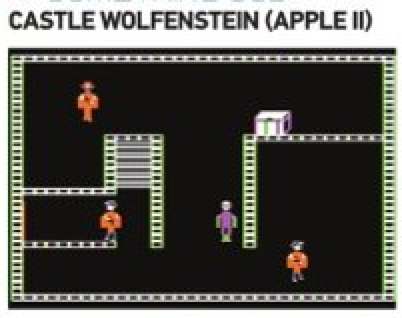
- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** XBOX 360
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** £39.99
- » **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** BLUEPOINT GAMES
- » **PLAYERS:** 1 (1-4 FOR PEACE WALKER)

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original *Metal Gear* was released on the MSX in 1987. Designed by Hideo Kojima, it's one of the earliest examples of the stealth genre and was ported to the NES. The series became synonymous with PlayStation with the release of *Metal Gear Solid* and is now one of Konami's most important franchises.

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN (APPLE II)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
SPLINTER CELL TRILOGY (PS3)





After impressing us a few issues back with its stunning remasters of *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus*, BluePoint Games is back with another superb collection of games.

Metal Gear Solid HD Collection contains loving remasters of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons Of Liberty*, *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater* and *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*. In addition, it also features the MSX versions of the original *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*. While it's disappointing that *Metal Gear Solid* or *Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots* weren't included – making it a truly definitive collection – you're still getting a hell of a lot of gameplay for your money, so it's difficult to complain.

Interestingly, both *Metal Gear Solid 2* and *3* are the later enhanced versions of the game, although it's worth noting that you won't be getting everything that appeared in the original versions. This is most notable in the case of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*, which no longer features Secret Theatre, Metal Gear Online, the Snake Vs. Monkey mini-game, or the Existence disc, which boasted the three-and-a-half-hour cut of *Metal Gear Solid 3*'s ludicrously over-the-top cinematics. Fortunately, even with these disappointing omissions, this is still a stunning collection of games, primarily because of the excellent job BluePoint Games has done.

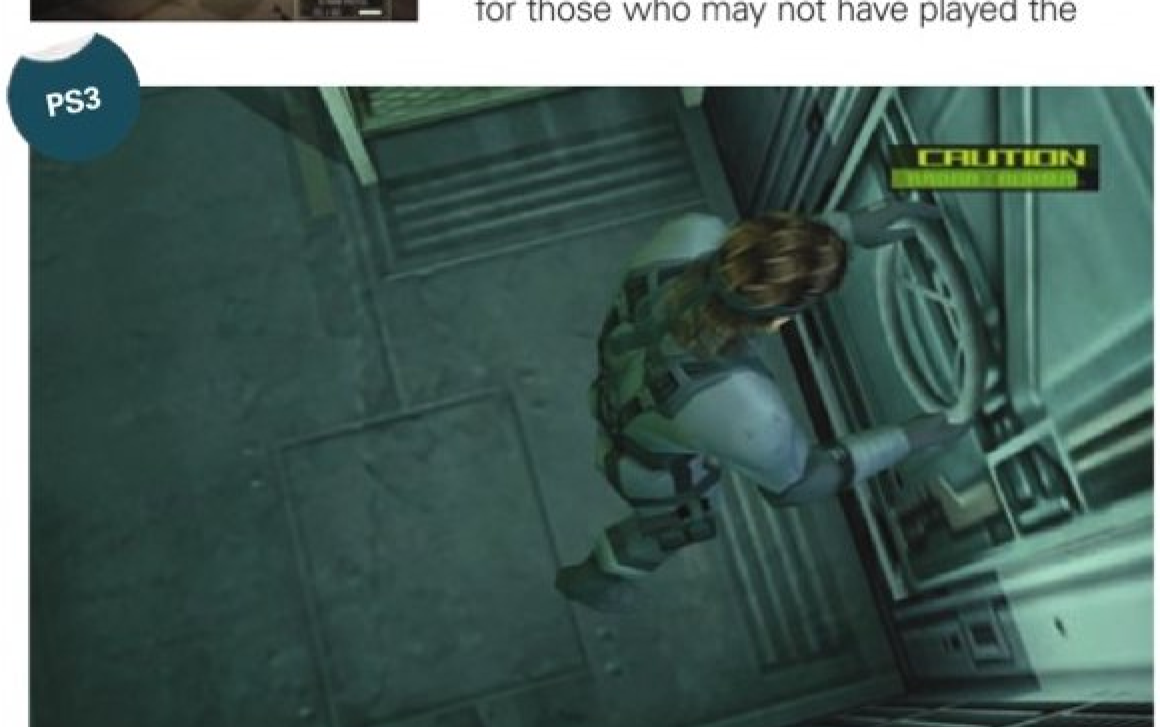
Before we go into the remaster, here's a quick lowdown on the games themselves, for those who may not have played the originals. *Metal Gear Solid 2* is an utterly barmy and disappointing follow-up to *Metal Gear Solid*, which is let down by its daft plot, clunky controls, overlong codec scenes and some truly appalling dialogue. The stealth is still well handled, and there are some satisfying bosses to battle, but its fixed cameras now make it feel a little tired. It also bravely puts you in control of a new protagonist, Raiden, which irked many fans on its original release.

Metal Gear 3: Snake Eater, on the other hand, is a far better game, possibly the best in the series. It builds brilliantly on the boss battles found in *Sons Of Liberty*, and while its over-the-top cut-scenes are no less silly, they work far better, as if Kojima is finally in on the joke and has stopped listening to his





» [PS3] The stealth genre has changed a lot over the last few years; when these games say stealth they mean it.



» [PS3] *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s camera is pretty weak now, highlighting how the genre has evolved.





✱GO DEEPER

The facts behind Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

>> Bluepoint Games was co-founded by Andy O'Neil, who first started making games on the MSX.

>> *The Ape Escape* mini-game is not included due to the licence belonging to Sony.

>> Fortunately, the excellent monsters from Capcom's *Monster Hunter* still appear in *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*.



» [PS3] These two shots show the amount of work BluePoint Games put into the remasters.





Secret snakes

IN ADDITION TO the three *Metal Gear Solid* titles included in BluePoint Games' new collection, you're also given two additional games for your hard-earned cash. The MSX and MSX2 versions of *Metal Gear* and *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake* were originally included in *Metal Gear Solid Subsistence*, and have thankfully been included here. Both games are worthy additions, particularly *Metal Gear 2: Solid Snake*, as *Subsistence* marked the first time it had been available in the UK. Both titles are not only great games in their own right, but also work as a nice history lesson, revealing just how far Kojima's franchise has evolved over the past 25 years.

adoring fans. It also benefits from the new *Subsistence* camera, enabling you to pan around Snake's jungle environments, which in turn makes the stealth sections far less frustrating to play. Add in new mechanics, such as fixing up Snake when he takes damage and surviving off the jungle itself, and *Snake Eater* is an excellent addition to the genre that still plays like a dream.

The final main game is *Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker*, which originally started life on the PSP. Due to the nature of the device the main structure of the game is mission-based, with levels split into small, linear, bite-sized chunks of gameplay and catering to four players (which this version still supports). Despite the handheld approach, it remains a truly absorbing game, even if the singing Metal Gears it features are no real substitute for the stunning boss encounters found in *Snake Eater*.

In terms of visual treatment, the three games look absolutely stunning remastered. It's worth noting the word 'remaster' too, because it's a completely different process to a remake like the recent *Halo: Combat Evolved Anniversary Collection*. BluePoint never had any intention of giving the releases a next-generation makeover with brand new high-definition textures; it just wanted to ensure that the original treatments looked as good as possible in high-definition. In this way, BluePoint Games acts more like Criterion, which restore original film prints as much as possible for their Blu-Ray release. BluePoint has managed this restoration by having a team of over 30 people redrawing the original textures to ensure that the remasters look as close as possible to the original games when viewed on a high-definition source. The end results look truly superb, with vibrant detailed textures that make the games look even better than you remember them looking originally. *Snake Eater* and *Peace Walker* look particularly smart, and, while high-definition highlights the sparseness of *Metal Gear Solid 2*'s locations, it still looks incredibly slick, particularly during cut-scenes.

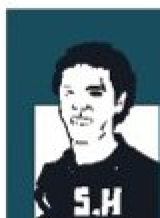
The biggest game to benefit is easily *Peace Walker*, which now has a proper way of rotating Snake's viewpoint, but all three games are definitely worth revisiting, even if you have played them many times before. Konami has two more collections in the pipeline (*Zone Of The Enders* and *Silent Hill*) it's going to be interesting to see if they've been given the same loving treatment as this compilation.

In a nutshell

Yes, a few niggling omissions stop this from being a truly definitive *MGS* collection, but there's no denying the care, love and attention that's gone into *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*. Don't miss it.

>> Score **93%**

OPINION



Even with a small number of tiny omissions, this remains an excellent achievement. The games have never looked better, and while *Metal Gear Solid 2* is starting to show its age, it remains an enjoyable addition to the franchise. *Peace Walker* is also brilliant, with BluePoint Games ironing out all the little control niggles that plagued the game on its original host hardware. Very impressive.

Stuart Hunt

» [PS3] *Peace Walker* benefits massively from this remaster, and not just because you can now rotate the camera properly.





» [Xbox 360] *Sonic CD* marked the series debut for Metal Sonic and Amy Rose.

✱ GO DEEPER

The facts behind Sonic CD

>> The famous animations were created by Toei Animation, with assistance from Studio Junio.

>> There are two different soundtracks: the Japanese/European version was by Naofumi Hataya and Masafumi Ogata, while the US version was composed by Spencer Nilsen.

✱ WHY NOT TRY

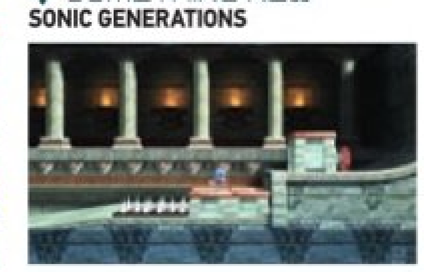
▼ SOMETHING OLD

SONIC 2



▽ SOMETHING NEW

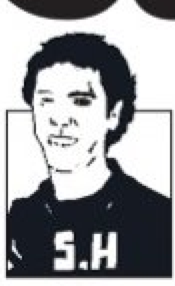
SONIC GENERATIONS





FINALLY GETTING THE STAGE IT DESERVES

Sonic CD



Originally appearing on Sega's ill-fated Mega-CD (and later receiving ports for PC, and PS2 and GameCube via the *Sonic Gems Collection*), many *Sonic* fans missed out on this superb and unique sequel. Which is a crying shame, as it's definitely one of the best entries in the long-running series. Well, it's taken a long time to get here, but *Sonic CD* now finally appears on current-gen platforms, and at a price that will hopefully see it experienced and enjoyed by many more people.

Though Sonic's popular two-tailed sidekick wasn't along for the ride, and Yuji Naka was busy making *Sonic 2* in the US, *Sonic CD* more than filled the fox and Naka-shaped holes, with stunning presentation and innovative level structure. It also featured a good helping of stunning anime cut-scenes (thanks to the CD format), two of the funkiest videogame soundtracks to grace a *Sonic* game, and a highly creative time-travel concept that allowed Sonic to dart through four different layers of each zone: past, present, and a bad or good future.

INFORMATION

- » **FEATURED SYSTEM:** XBLA
- » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PSN / iOS / ANDROID
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PRICE:** 400 POINTS
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SEGA / BLIT SOFTWARE / CHRISTIAN WHITEHEAD
- » **PLAYERS:** 1

BRIEF HISTORY

» *Sonic CD* started its life as an enhanced version of *Sonic 2*, before its director and Sonic designer, Naoto Oshima, scrapped this idea and forged along with his own *Sonic* sequel instead. It was a good thing, too, as the virtuoso director succeeded in creating an original and ambitious 2D *Sonic* game.

This clever time-switching mechanic is what makes *Sonic CD* unlike any other *Sonic* game. Not only does it give *Sonic CD* plenty of replayability, it also mixes up the traditional race-to-the-gate gameplay, as completing the game fully requires Sonic to explore all the stages, travel to the past, and find and destroy Robotnik's time-meddling machines to ensure that a good future takes place, and not a bad one.

And thanks to *Sonic* fan Christian Whitehead's Retro Engine (which impressed Sega enough to get him and his tech heavily involved in this HD revisit), *Sonic CD*'s future has never looked brighter. It's also good to see that Sega and Blit Software have seemingly left no stone unturned in their pursuit to delight fans of the original.

OPINION



Sega is quickly becoming a force to reckon with when it comes to digital updates of classic games. *Sonic CD* was always a great game on the Mega-CD, but subtle little tweaks make it better than ever. *Sonic CD* is one of my favourite *Sonic* games, so I'm very happy with this port.

Darran Jones

The sprites look vibrant and crisp, the action is more fluid, and it's fair to say that Mega-CD games rarely, if ever, receive so much love. Everything is now displayed in glorious full-screen, both the US and Japanese soundtracks are included, completion now unlocks Tails to replay the game with, and you can even opt to play using the *Sonic 2* variant of Sonic's spin-attack. But the best thing of all is the new price – at just 400 Microsoft Points it is incredible value.

With its sterling treatments on *Guardian Heroes*, *Daytona USA* and now *Sonic CD*, Sega is fast becoming one of the finest purveyors of digital content out there at the moment. If you're reading this, Sega, we're requesting similar digital handlings of *Streets Of Rage*, *Clockwork Knight* and the *Panzer Dragoon* series, please.

In a Nutshell

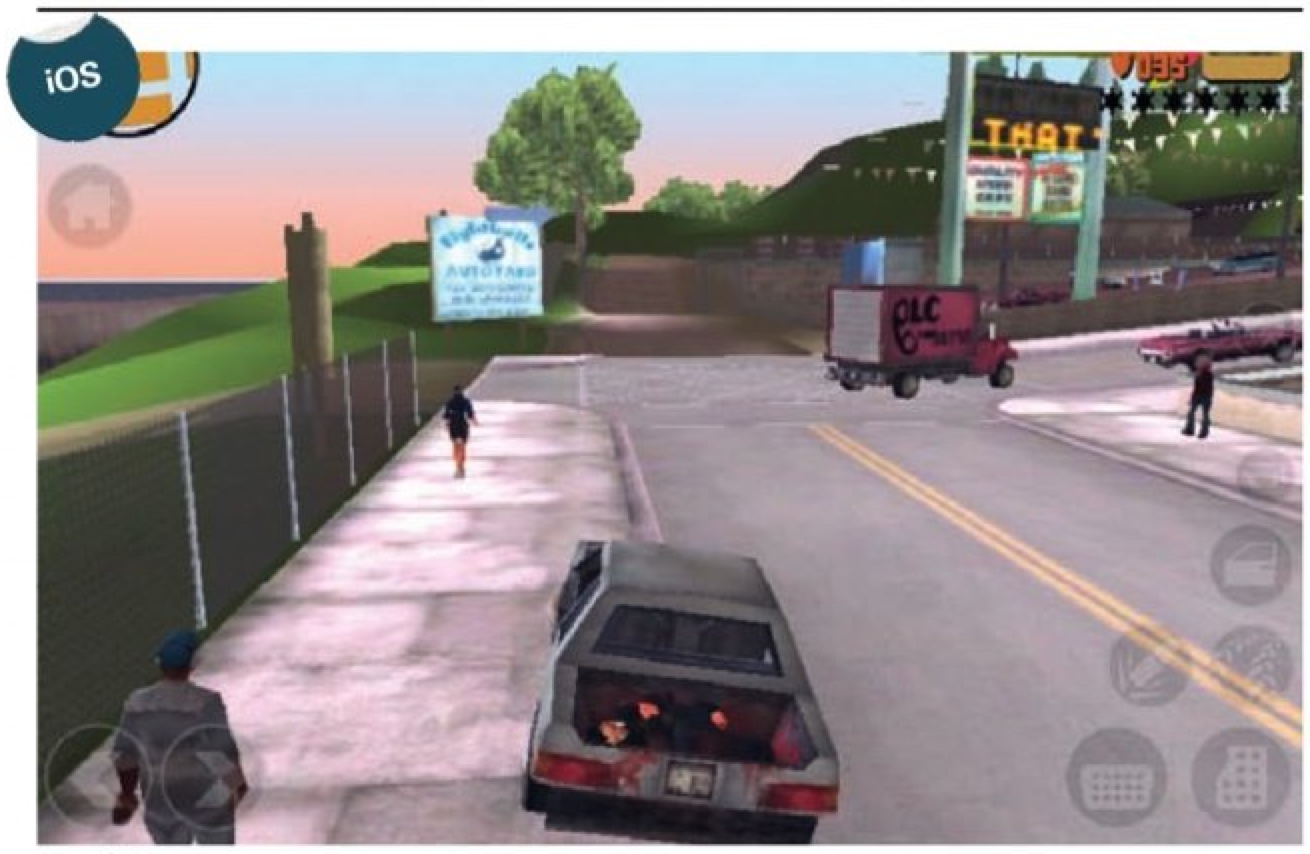
It's a stunning and loving update that delivers on every level. Seriously, you'd be stark raving bonkers not to throw 400 points at Sega for this gem.

>> **Score 90%**

Grand Theft Auto III

IT'S TIME TO BLOW UP THE CANDLES!

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** iOS » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PS2, XBOX, PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £2.99 » **PUBLISHER:** ROCKSTAR GAMES » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE » **PLAYERS:** 1



» [iOS] While the controls could be tighter, *GTA III* is a solid and faithful port.

After *Grand Theft Auto* was reborn for *GTA III*, giving gamers an open world where they are able to do crazy stuff like steal a 3D ambulance, pick up a 3D corner worker and drive them headlong into a 3D police car, it's fair to say that videogames were never quite the same again.

Celebrating its ten-year anniversary last year, *GTA III* has now received a new iOS (and Android) port and the result is an ambitious and impressive feat of miniaturisation. Indeed, the entire game is here – every block, every mission, and every radio station – and it's aged surprisingly well.

There is one fly in the ointment, though. With a screen awash with virtual buttons, the interface feels clunky. There are separate buttons for running, jumping, firing weapons, accelerating and braking, entering vehicles, altering the camera, opening the map, even switching radio stations. And while you can adjust their position



and size, it doesn't improve things all that much. We found ourselves occasionally trying to kill a lamppost because our thumb was resting slightly off the direction button.

With practice, driving starts to feel solid enough, though the same cannot be said about the new firing system. This re-release now has auto-aiming, but feels inaccurate in busy gunfights because the reticle has an annoying habit of snapping onto the wrong guy, or sometimes even pedestrians. With a measure of luck and by rethinking your approach you can often complete the mission, but the game doesn't make it easy.

If the unsurprising control issue doesn't faze you, and you've been pining for a *Grand Theft Auto* experience for your smart phone, this faithful and technically impressive port is still entertaining, and certainly good enough value at the asking price for us to still recommend.

OPINION

There's no denying that *GTA III* is a tremendous achievement, showing just what's possible on iOS. Unfortunately, while the game looks the business, I'm not too impressed with the included control systems. Rockstar has done its best to streamline them, but the clunky controls are infuriating.

Darran Jones

» Score **70%**



» [PS3] The live ammo of *Stranger's Wrath* still feels amazingly innovative, and hasn't yet been bettered.

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath HD

MAKE A GREAT GAME BETTER: JUST ADD WATER

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS3 » **ALSO AVAILABLE ON:** PC » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW » **PRICE:** £9.99
» **PUBLISHER:** JUST ADD WATER » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE/ODDWORLD INHABITANTS » **PLAYERS:** 1

You have to feel sorry for *Stranger's Wrath*. It was a critically acclaimed game, but thanks to its host platform and a publisher, which didn't seem to realise what it had, hardly anyone has played it. Just Add Water is hoping to change that with this fantastic new HD update, which should hopefully endear it to a brand new generation of gamers.

OddWorld: Stranger's Wrath puts you in the titular shoes of Stranger, a lone bounty hunter who sounds like Clint Eastwood. Stranger needs a lot of money for an undisclosed operation, and earns this money, or Moolah, by visiting towns and collecting the bounties on the various varmints that are terrorising the local chicken townsfolk. It's a fun idea for a game, made more enjoyable by the fact that all the ammo Stranger uses is live,



literally. Various furry critters chatter away as they wait to be fired from Stranger's double-barrelled crossbow.

Stranger's Wrath also effortlessly flits between third and first-person as the action requires it. It's a clever system that features a healthy boast of platforming, shooting and adventuring (first explored in Nintendo's excellent *Metroid Prime*), complete with an exciting concoction of stealth elements, humour and even armed combat.

Just Add Water's update improves an already great game. The frame-rate is most noticeable, running at 60fps, with only the occasional hiccup, which adds immeasurably to the experience. It's also looks wonderful, with sharp new textures that really bring Oddworld Inhabitants' oddball world to life. Here's hoping that more gamers actually get to experience it this time around.

OPINION

I've never played *Stranger's Wrath* before, so I'm now kicking myself after letting this hidden gem completely pass me by. Its core concepts may not be too original, but they've rarely been done better than they are here. It's received a very nice graphical update as well, which does further improve an already great game.

Stuart Hunt

» Score **90%**

RETROROUND-UP



>> Every month we take a look at the latest classics that have been re-released for a new generation of gamers

✱ DOWNLOAD OF THE MONTH

WarioWare, Inc: Mega Microgame$

INFORMATION
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★★



Even now, the sheer inventiveness and addictive nature of *WarioWare* astonishes us.

It's effectively a large collection of inventive mini-games, held together by the loosest of plots. Realising that videogames are big business, Wario decides to make them himself. Being the lazy git that he is, though, it isn't long before he tires of the task and ropes in a number of friends to help him. His wacky mates often have their own distinct types of games – 9-Volt, for example, is a Nintendo nut, and his games are based on classic Nintendo titles – which adds massively to *WarioWare*'s variety and ensures that you're always playing something new.

The games themselves are extremely simple, often requiring just a single button or D-pad press to complete, but careful timing and an ever-increasing speed ensures that many of these games are far from easy. You'll typically have around five seconds to complete a task, which might range from grabbing a slice of toast as it pops out of a toaster to sniffing up a giant drop hanging from a woman's nose. It's crazy, it makes absolutely no sense, but it remains one of the best examples of a mini-game compilation and is so much insane fun that it shouldn't be missed under any circumstances.

>> OTHER HIGHLIGHTS



Mario Kart: Super Circuit
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* has always been our favourite handheld version of the classic franchise, and while it doesn't look as nice as we remember, it's still a fantastic little racer. The re-creations of the SNES tracks are great fun to race on and the speed still manages to impress, while the track design feels as excellent as it always has. You'll probably still want *Mario Kart 7*, but you may be surprised by just how good *Super Circuit* still is.



Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» *Fire Emblem* never gets the love it deserves, so it's great to see its best Western GBA outing included here. Effectively a fantasy version of *Advance Wars*, *The Sacred Stones* features robust play mechanics, genuinely engaging characters and an involving story that's full of twists and turns. The graphics may look crude, but the utterly absorbing gameplay will have you completely hooked.



Metroid Fusion
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» We may never get another 2D *Metroid*, so console yourself with the excellent *Metroid Fusion*. Despite being created for a handheld, it's just as epic as any past *Metroid* adventure and is brimming with atmosphere and tough boss battles. It's also beautifully structured, allowing you to really appreciate the excellent level design and smart weaponry that Samus has at her disposal. A tense storyline with Samus being stalked by a superior foe seals the deal.



The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Score:** ★★★★★
» Capcom was no stranger to the *Zelda* franchise by the time *The Minish Cap* appeared, and it shows in this expertly crafted adventure. While it still follows the standard *Zelda* template quite closely, it's filled with plenty of enchanting moments – the miniature Picori, talking hat Ezlo – new items, and a genuine sense of wonder as you explore the highly detailed, miniaturised world in which Link finds himself.

▼ VIRTUAL CONSOLE

It's been a great month for 3DS owners, as all the GBA games for the Ambassador programme were finally made available. Good times for those with an early machine.

Kirby & The Amazing Mirror
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Wario Land 4
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Mario vs Donkey Kong
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Yoshi's Island: Super Mario Advance 3
» **System:** Game Boy Advance
» **Buy it for:** Free
» **Buy it from:** 3DS Virtual Console
» **Score:** ★★★★★

▼ PSN

It's been a pretty busy time for PSN, with both *Ico* and *Shadow Of The Colossus* receiving the download treatment.

Ico
» **System:** PS2
» **Buy it for:** £13.99
» **Score:** ★★★★★

Shadow Of The Colossus
» **System:** PS2
» **Buy it for:** £13.99
» **Score:** ★★★★★

Gex
» **System:** PSone
» **Buy it for:** £3.99
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

World Heroes
» **System:** Neo Geo
» **Buy it for:** £7.99
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Mickey's Wild Adventures
» **System:** PSone
» **Buy it for:** £4.79
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆



▼ PC SERVICES

Insane sales over both Steam and GOG have meant it's been a pretty quiet time for PC owners, with few new releases.

Ultima 7: The Complete Edition
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Fahrenheit
» **Buy it for:** $5.99 (£3.72)
» **Buy it from:** www.gog.com
» **Score:** ★★★★☆

Evolva
» **Buy it for:** €5.99 (£5.13)
» **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

Conquest Of The New World
» **Buy it for:** €5.99
» **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
» **Score:** ★★☆☆☆

SpellForce: Platinum Edition
» **Buy it for:** €9.99 (£8.73)
» **Buy it from:** www.dotemu.com
» **Score:** ★★★☆☆

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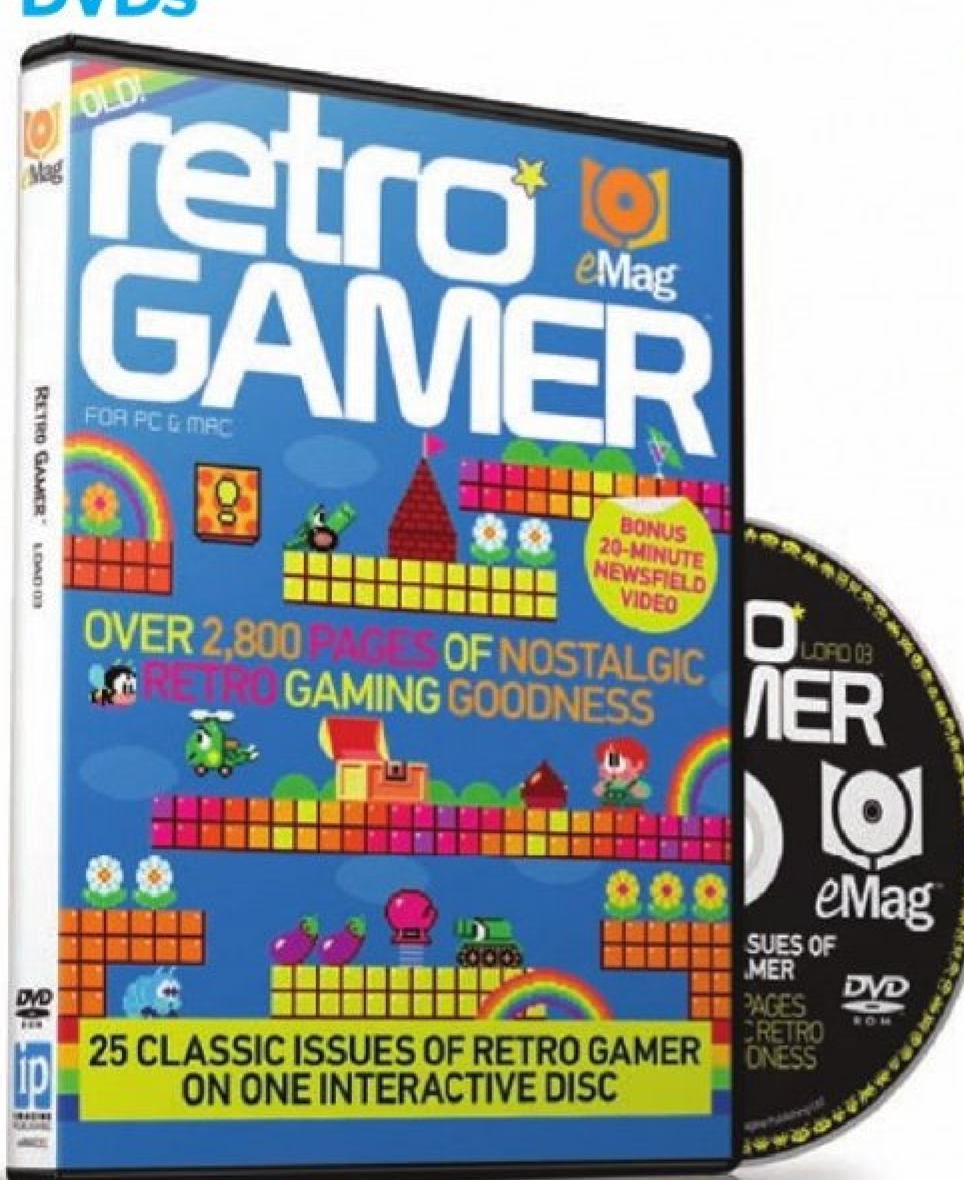


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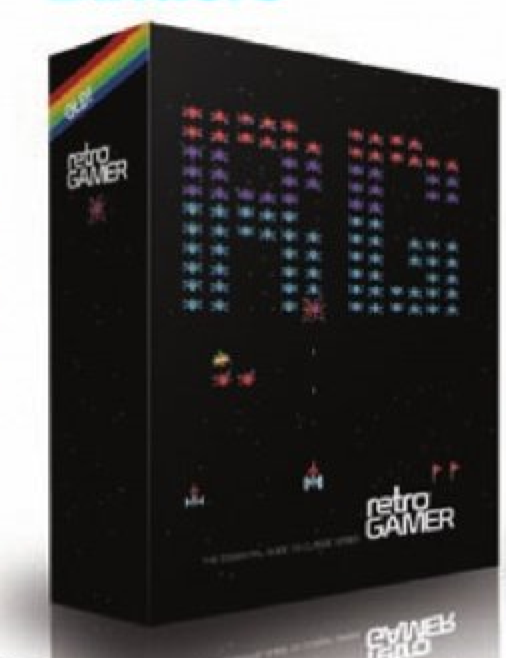


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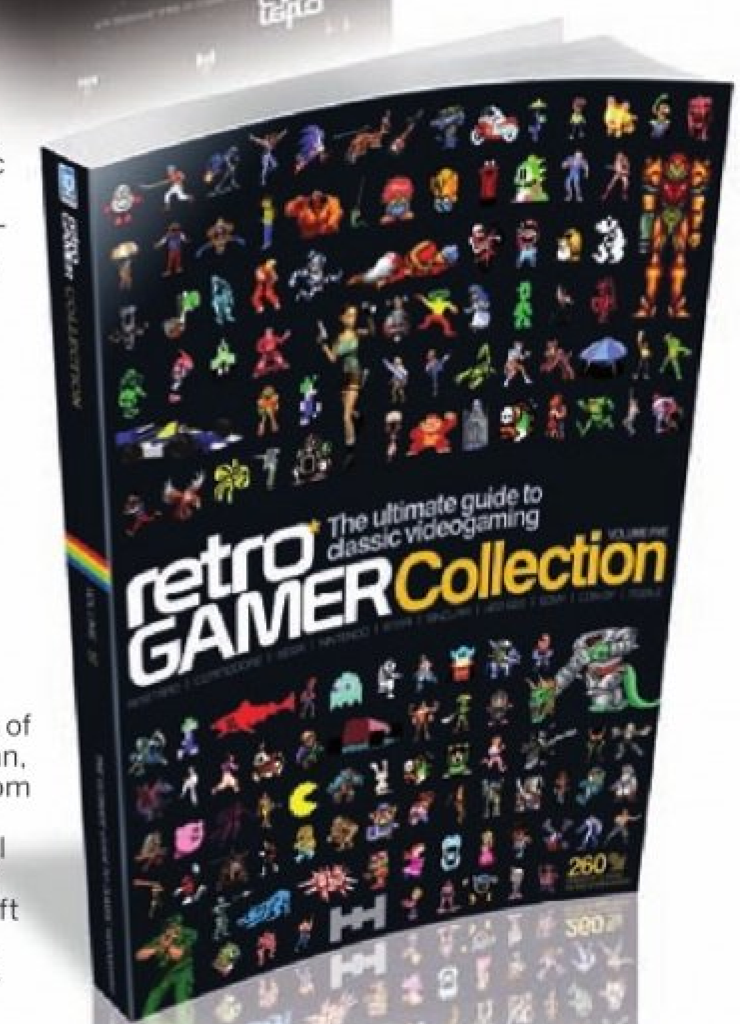


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HOMEBREW

>> The scene's latest news and reviews



I don't usually find myself talking about Microsoft but, along with the fiddly new user interface, the recent update to the Xbox 360 Dashboard hasn't exactly helped to promote Indie games. Microsoft charges XBLIG developers a fee to use the service and takes a cut of the profits, so the very least it could do is avoid squirrelling these money-making products away

SHOOT 'EM UP DESTRUCTION SET 2

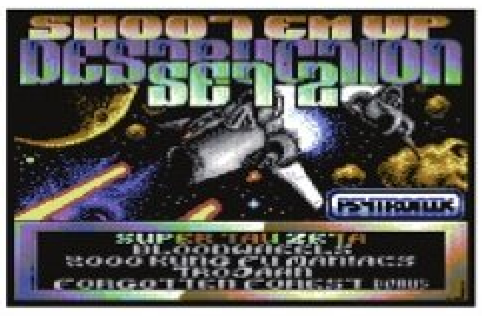
retro GAMER SIZZLER

KILLING IN THE NAME OF





» [C64] Don't go walking slow on your own…



» **FORMAT:** C64
» **DEVELOPED BY:** PSYTRONIK
» **LINK:** KIKSTART.EU/SEUDS-2
» **RELEASE DATE:** 2011
» **PRICE:** £4.99 + P&P TAPE OR BUDGET DISK, £12.99 + P&P PREMIUM DISK OR £1.99 DOWNLOAD

The *Shoot 'Em Up Destruction Set 2* is a compilation of games created with Sensible Software's original *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* and Jon Wells' more recent horizontally scrolling revision, all of which have had their code enhanced to add extra features not available from the original editor. And, along with some bonus items on the disk, the main collection consists of four games: *Bloodwheels* and *Trojahn* are both vertical scrollers while *Super Tau Zeta* and *2,000 Kung-Fu Maniacs* move horizontally, scrolling left to right rather than the more conventional right to left because the *Sideways SEUCK* only goes in the one direction.

Super Tau Zeta is the most traditional space-bound shoot-'em-up of the four, although it does still have some tricks up its sleeve; rather than issuing just the one measly ship, the player is handed control of five in a V-shaped formation, all of which are linked so that they'll explode if one is destroyed. These craft have been loaded to capacity with the refugees from an interstellar war that are desperately searching for a new home, and they've got quite a long and violent journey ahead of them.

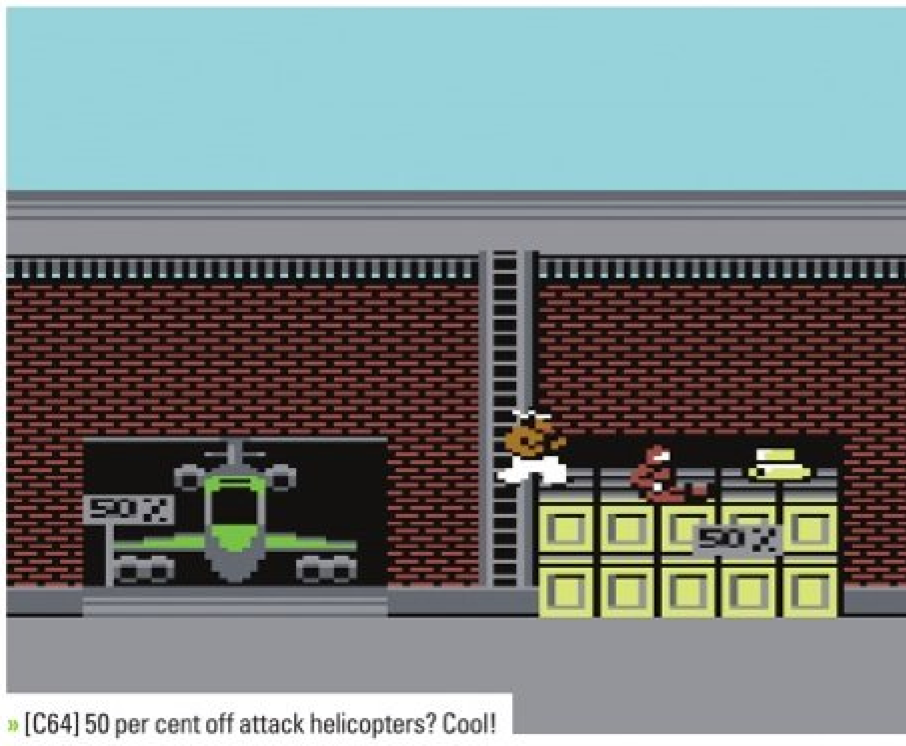
If a relaxing drive in the countryside sounds nice, there's *Bloodwheels*… assuming that the driving can include being attacked by tanks or helicopters, 'countryside' can be used to mean 'battle zone', and 'relaxing' means 'violent', of course. There's a little bit of *Jackal* in this push-scrolling blaster, although *Bloodwheels* is more about using caution than thundering in with all guns blazing.

And fans of muscle-bound heroes will enjoy *Trojahn*, where a beautiful maiden is in danger of being sacrificed to a minotaur unless her body-building, topless boyfriend can wade through all manner of enemies to rescue her. To make things a little easier, there are urns containing potions that will improve the hero's firepower or make him temporarily invincible.

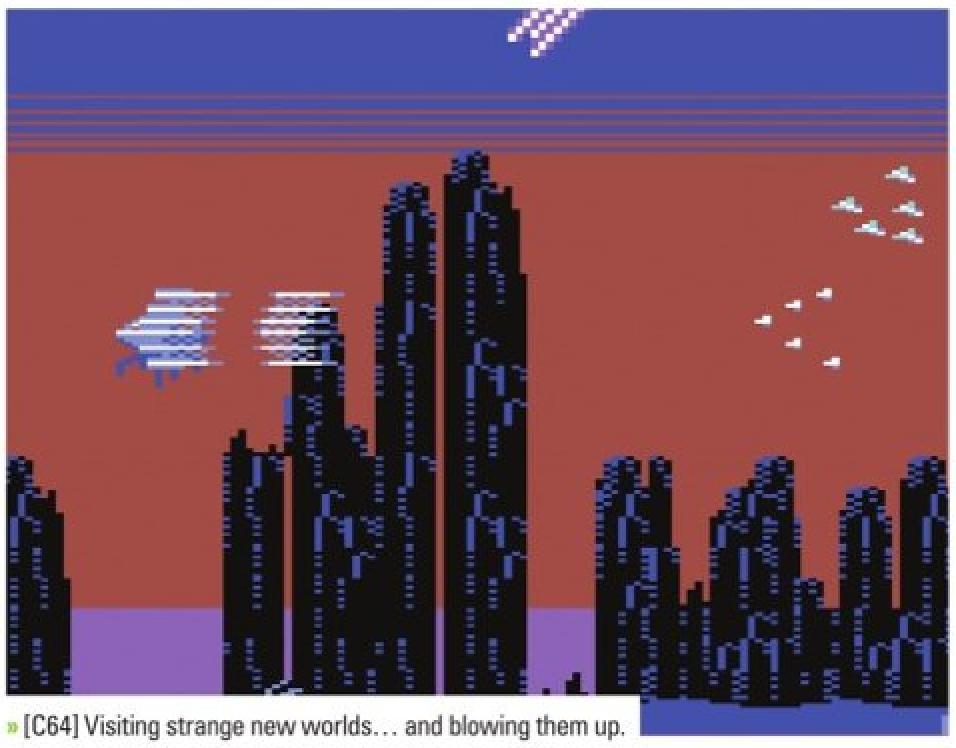
Finally, we come to *2,000 Kung-Fu Maniacs*, the odd one out since, although it was built with the same tool as the others, it's been 'persuaded' to be a platform-based game with a slightly warped sense of humour. The primary mission, along with defeating large quantities of ninjas, is to buy some pickled herring – it's not without reason that the game is subtitled *Way Of The Exploding Fish* – and the battles rage in such diverse locations as the aisles of the Happy Moose mega mart, an international arms fair and the Old Ninja public house. Power-ups are available, ranging from shurikens to… well, annoyed poodles.

Developer Alf Yngve gained a reputation for imaginative use of the *Shoot-'Em-Up Construction Kit* during the Nineties, and this collection, along with the bonus game *Forgotten Forest* – a 'clone' of *Forbidden Forest* produced with the horizontal-scrolling flavour of *SEUCK* – demonstrate very well why that happened.

90%



» [C64] 50 per cent off attack helicopters? Cool!



» [C64] Visiting strange new worlds… and blowing them up.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at:
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

FICKLE

» **FORMAT:** UNEXPANDED VIC-20 » **DEVELOPER:** MALCOLM TYRRELL » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/FICKLE » **PRICE:** FREE



» [VIC-20] Rolling, rolling, rolling.

Poor Fickle. With a name like that, he's bound to be a bit indecisive! Every level has a heart that needs collecting, but he just wanders around in desperate need of guidance. Fickle can be in one of two states; if he's green, the spinning wheels will govern his movement through the maze and he can collect keys or manipulate switches, but if he's red, he'll pass straight through these elements, and the player can press a key on the VIC's keyboard to toggle Fickle between these modes.

As the game progresses, more elements are introduced, including roaming enemies, barriers that are opened with a key or a switch, and jagged walls that are always fatal to the touch. *Fickle* is tough from the beginning, and each level needs some forethought and timing to complete. It isn't going to suit everybody, but those with quick minds and reactions should try it.

81%

CORACLE

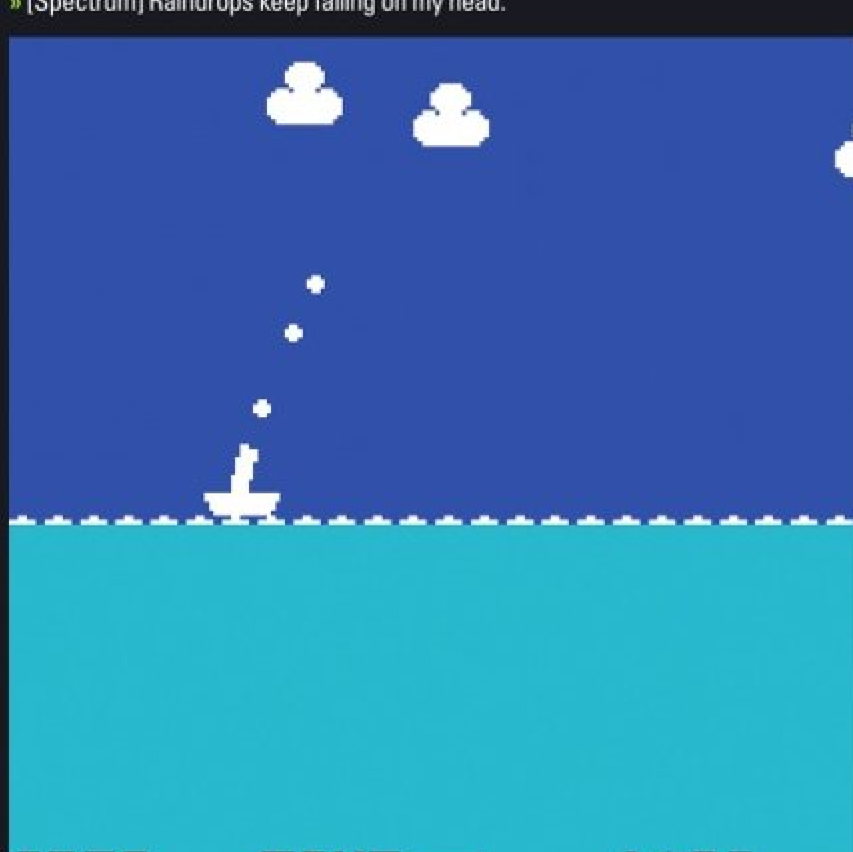
» **FORMAT:** SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** JONATHAN CAULDWELL » **DOWNLOAD:** CRONOSOFT.CO.UK » **PRICE:** £3.99 + P&P TAPE OR FREE DOWNLOAD

A life on the ocean sounds like fun, but there are perils as well. As your coracle drifts back and forth across the screen, pushing up and down on the joystick will temporarily speed up or slow down its movement, left and right aims the gun, and the fire button launches one of a limited supply of balls.

Each level is divided into two phases. To begin with, the water must be raised by shooting down clouds and destroying anything threatening to lower it again and, when there's enough H_2O around, bubbles begin to float past that, when popped, will disgorge sea creatures to capture. *Coracle* is one of the toughest Jonathan Cauldwell games we've played for a while, with its finite ammo and time limit, but potential buyers can decide by downloading it from the World of Spectrum archive – hiding behind **kikstart.eu/coracle** – for a test run.

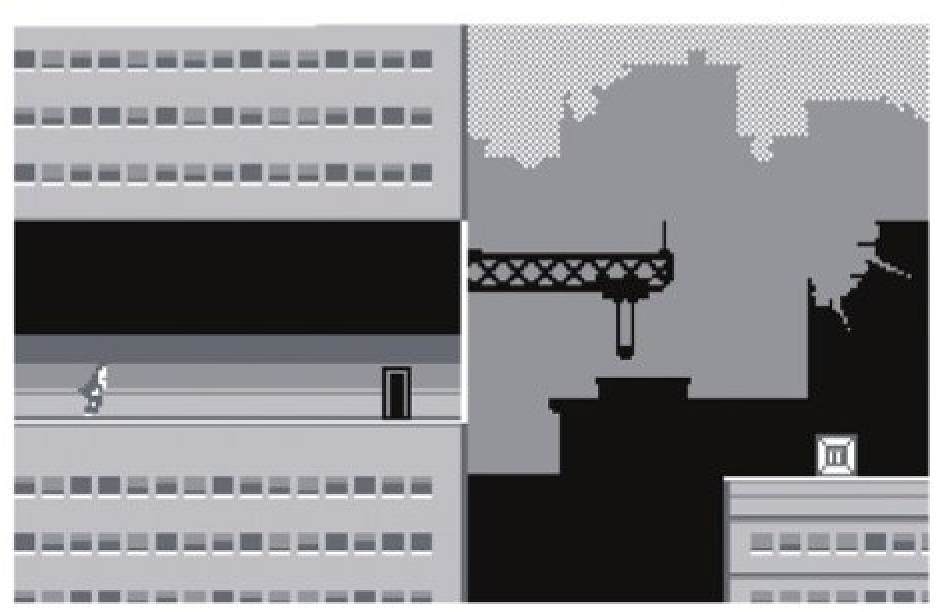
86%

» [Spectrum] Raindrops keep falling on my head.





» [C64] Up, up and awaaay!



CANABALT

» **FORMAT:** C64 » **DEVELOPER:** ANDREAS VARGA
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/CANABALT-64 » **PRICE:** FREE

The C64 has seen not one but two versions of *Canabalt* recently, and this one, produced by Andreas 'Mr SID' Varga, was the first out of the gate. For those who haven't played the original, the world is in the middle of another alien invasion and, rather than braving unknown horrors, our hero decides to leg it, making his way from rooftop to rooftop. There's just the one control to aid the terrified chap as he flees for his life – pressing the space bar or fire button on a joystick makes him jump between buildings, through plate glass windows of office blocks or over alien death machines that have fallen from the sky.

The original *Canabalt* was addictive and frustrating in roughly equal measure, and this C64 version captures that very well, leaving players swearing profusely at the screen just moments before stabbing the fire button to start another run.

86%

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community



» [C64] Bounce, bounce.

>> Hey, hey, 16K

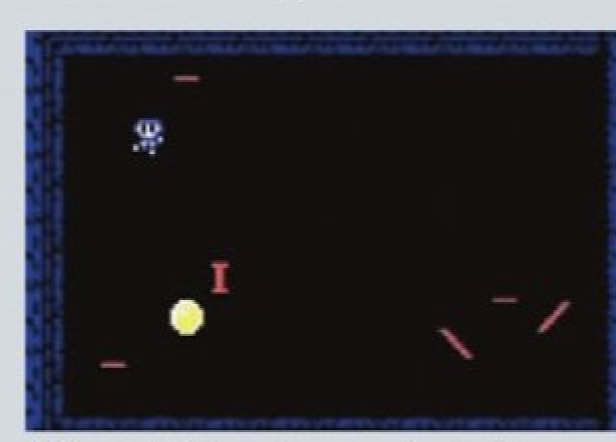
A remarkable ten new C64 games were released at the end of the RGCD 16K cartridge competition, with one re-release for good measure. The new games include a conversion of Atari 2600 classic *Yars' Revenge*, a visually beefed up *Warlords* clone, a scrolling shoot-'em-up starring a sheep, and the official port of Adam Atomic's *Canabalt*. **rgcd.co.uk** is the place to go for downloads and ordering information.



» [Spectrum] Is that the Dwayne?

>> We're all doomed

We're not entirely sure what to make of *ZXoom*. It's sort of like *Doom* meets *3D Monster Maze*. There are lots of shadowy figures firing at the player, but all the movement is in large jumps between 'cells' of the map. It's probably best to see it as a work-in-progress right now, but a playable version can be grabbed from the thread at World of Spectrum, which is linked to by **kikstart.eu/zxoom-preview**



» [Odyssey 2] Sticks and stones may break my bones.

>> Having a wizard time

Not to be confused with a certain yellow dinosaur, Revival Studios' *Mayhem* is a frantic single-screen action game for the Magnavox Odyssey 2 and Philips Videopac starring trainee wizard Wizzy. Having just tried a major spell to create fire, the poor lad has brought the sticks he was trying to ignite to life and must collect coins while avoiding them. Have a look at **kikstart.eu/ mayhem-magnavox** for the trailer video.

HOMEBREW

WHAT'S BREWING?

All the latest news from the homebrew community

>> Have you met my friend Julia set?

Okay, so *Fractalus* isn't technically a game, but it's certainly retro – during the 16-bit era there were hundreds, if not thousands, of similar programs available from public domain services. *Fractalus* generates a Mandelbrot or Julia set and allows the 'player' to navigate it with the joypad, zooming in or out while listening to music. It costs 80 Points and is at least one way to relax after a busy session, so it might be worth looking at **kikstart.eu/fractalus**



>> Pot the red then screw back

One of the recent releases to the Xbox Live Indie service is *21 Ball Snooker Champion*, a competent-looking snooker simulation that offers both single-player against the console play with three difficulty levels to select from, and four-player team games for when your friends turn up and want to grab a snooker bat and pocket a few balls. Armchair John Virgos need only aim their cues at **kikstart.eu/21-ball**

FLASH BOREDOM



Want to know how to while away those boring office hours? Then don't miss out on **Retro Gamer**'s Flash game of the month. This month we look at **Shameless Clone.**

MOST SHOOT-'EM-UPS aren't as honest about themselves as *Shameless Clone*! Blast off with one of three wacky characters to fight against hordes of minions of something that looks suspiciously like Bowser and the LOLCats, collecting power-ups and coins to upgrade your weapons along the way. **kikstart.eu/shameless-clone**

XBOX LIVE INDIE GAMES ROUND-UP





INVASION

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/INVASION



The witty banter between our square-jawed and slightly condescending hero and his grizzled commander back at base – neither of whom are afraid of puns or breaking the fourth wall once in a while – delivers *Invasion*'s back story; alien forces have, rather unsurprisingly considering the game's title, invaded the planet, and wouldn't you know it? Only the heroic Stockton can do anything about it.

And although he's supposedly on an infiltration mission, Stockton isn't afraid of making a mess of the place and has been given access to several explosive toys to bludgeon his way into enemy territory. That said, the enemies aren't exactly using pea shooters either, so getting used to the firing system, learning when to switch between the two weapons currently being carried for best effect and using the shoulder buttons to fire at angles are musts to survive past the first couple of areas.

Invasion isn't the world's most original game and even makes reference to its own ancestry, with a couple of enemy soldiers in the first area discussing *Contra* and the Konami code, but it's a solid run-and-gun game that's got its tongue welded firmly to its cheek, even to the point of cutting away from Stockton's mission in order to let a character from one of the developer's other games pop up for a few stages to get a quick plug in.



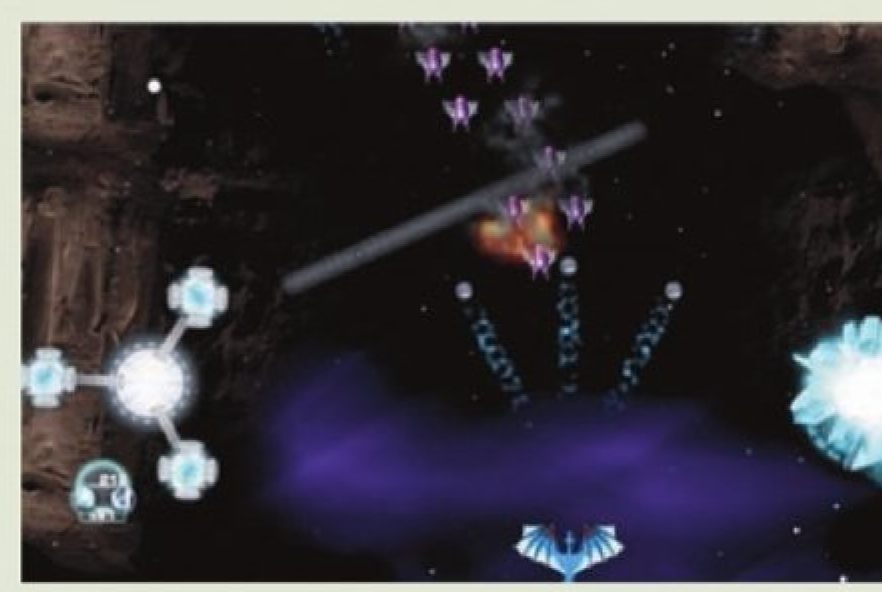
ELFSQUAD 7

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ELFSQUAD-7



Santa's had problems keeping up with demand and decided that automation is the way forward, so the elves construct a toy-making machine to keep things running at the North Pole. This machine, called Kevin for no obvious reason, is hailed as the saviour of Christmas, so it's inevitable that something will go wrong.

And now an elite team, Elfsquad 7, have to step in and save the festive season, traversing platforms while blasting thrown gifts with guns that magically wrap them before collecting the newly created falling prezzies. The game supports up to four simultaneous players, all blasting and grabbing gifts while avoiding the enemies because it's bad for their elf. Sorry…



DRAGONS VS SPACESHIPS

» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/D-V-S

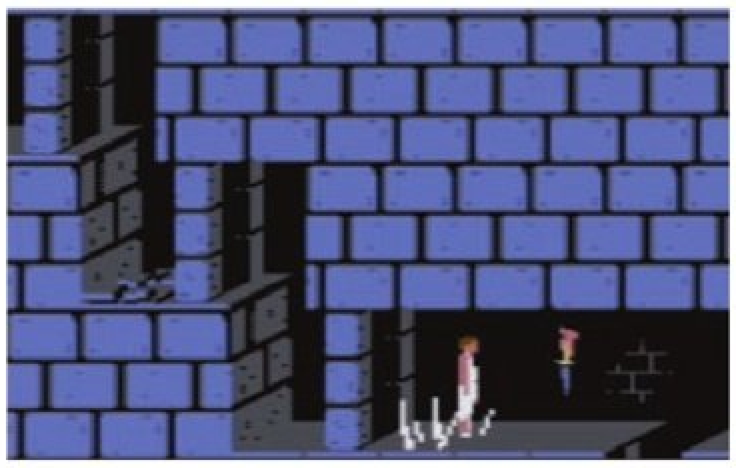


It doesn't take a rocket scientist to work out what *Dragons vs Spaceships* is about. You've got dragons and spaceships battling with each other, with the players getting to control some airborne reptiles. That looks pretty awesome on paper, but it doesn't work due to the implementation.

Ignoring the bland graphics and a few obvious flaws in the plot, the game itself isn't particularly well-executed, with some heavy inertia on the controls that make steering the dragon feel like moving through treacle. That isn't bad in itself, but when combined with an annoyingly large collision area and fast-moving bullets – sometimes shot by off-screen enemies – it does make for a painfully difficult game.







» [C64] Andreas's C64 version (right) is a faithful version of the DOS edition (left).



» Below: Disassembling the Apple II code.

THE RE-MAKING OF PRINCE OF PERSIA

The recent C64 version of Prince Of Persia was hailed as the C64 game of 2011 on its release, so we're talking to Andreas 'Mr SID' Varga to find out just what was involved in porting the Apple II classic

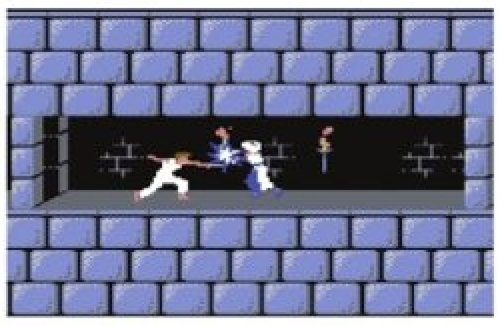
Retro Gamer: What was it about *Prince Of Persia* that initially persuaded you to attempt a C64 version?
Andreas Varga: A while ago I was looking for possible Commodore 64 projects, and I came across this classic. It's often found on people's lists of 'games that should've been released on the C64', and a friend of mine made the comment that a C64 version would really be something. At that point I started researching the technicalities to figure out if a port would be feasible at all, since I only knew about the PC and Amiga versions. After I found out that there was a version for the Apple II, which has roughly the same performance characteristics as the C64, I knew that I could do it.

RG: And how long did it take from first deciding to attempt the conversion through to completion?
AV: I started work in May of 2009 and released in October of [2011], but there was an 18-month period where I didn't work on it at all. So effectively it took less than a year to complete.

RG: Who else was involved with *Prince Of Persia* and what part did they play in the development process?
AV: I was very lucky that Steve Day, a veteran C64 graphics artist from the old days, was also considering a C64 version of *Prince Of Persia*. He re-created the bulk of the graphics, all the animations, the artwork for the titles and cut-scenes, and most of the level backgrounds, and allowed me to use his work. I filled in the missing pieces myself with the help of Mikael Backlund. In the end, Owen Crowley stepped in and produced awesome sound effects for the game in a very short time. I couldn't have done it without these guys.

RG: Were there any outstanding moments during development where things went particularly well or possibly badly?





» [C64] Have at thee!



AV: There were many points where I was doubtful if the project could be completed at all. The main issue was that this game is a huge memory hog, because of the countless detailed animations. It really requires a machine with at least 128K to run, but I had to work with 64K and that quickly became a drag. It's easy to get into a situation where most of the work you do is just memory optimisations and little else gets done. Having to constantly shuffle things around, forcing yourself to redo something that was already working, can quickly drain all your motivation.

So in the end it was only possible because I chose to use a cartridge as the storage medium for the game. This allowed me to work comfortably and made sure that the quality of the conversion would do the original justice.

RG: Looking back at *Prince Of Persia* a few months on, is there anything you'd have done differently?
AV: I'm happy to say that there's not much that went wrong in the end. It's always tricky to release a game if your own level of ambition is high, and there are so many things that can go wrong, but I'm quite lucky that everything turned out fine. I had a lot of fun working on this project, and I hope that it's noticeable to people when they play the game.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

STAR LETTER

RETRO CONUNDRUM

Dear Retro Gamer,

Your magazine just keeps getting better and better! I have been with you guys from the very beginning, being the proud owner of every issue since you launched way back in 2004. I just can't understand the arguments from some of your readers that console games from the PS2/Dreamcast/GameCube era should have no place in your esteemed magazine. I almost spit out my coffee in disgust whenever I read such comments.

It got me thinking, when **RG** first started in 2004, you were covering games from ten years earlier. So what exactly is the problem your readers have with your magazine in 2011 covering games from ten years ago? There are new generations of players coming through constantly, and to teenagers and those in their twenties, the games they played as kids will certainly be regarded as 'retro' to them.

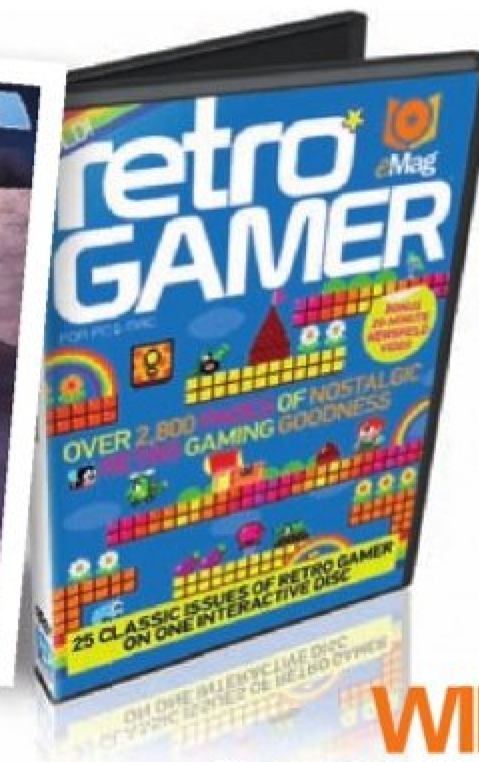
So come on, don't give in to the minority of whingers who argue that your magazine should only cover articles from the Eighties.

Keep up the excellent work, guys.

Martyn Hicks, Tavistock, Devon

We've never understood it either. Particularly when you consider how long the magazine has been in print now. Retro Gamer will always focus on the 8-bit generation, because that's where many readers began their love affair with gaming, but that's not to say we won't continue to feature newer games, franchises and systems as the magazine gets older. We think the balance is pretty good at the moment, so don't expect it to change any time soon. Do expect a free eMag, though, for putting forward such a well-structured argument.





WIN!

Every month, one lucky reader will receive a copy of our latest eMag, **Retro Gamer Load 3**, a bargain if ever there was one. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words, or something *Strider*-related will go down just as well…

THE KIDS ARE ALL RIGHT

Dear Retro Gamer,

About two years ago I won Star Letter with a picture of my baby girl Lois reading **RG** with me. Well this is her, two and a half years later, still loving Back To The Eighties… with her new brother, Jesse. Anyway, I didn't think it would be a proper mailbox without a picture of some poor children being forced to read a magazine they're clearly too young for!

Nick Lo Turco (aged 32 and a half), Lois (two and a half) and Jesse (one and a quarter)

That's a great picture, Nick. Unfortunately, your efforts to tug at our heartstrings are in vain this time, but it's still great to see readers starting off at such a young age.



» Perfect proof that *Retro Gamer* is attracting younger readers every day.

THE MAKING OF RETRO GAMER

Hi Darran,

First of all, I'm a huge fan of **Retro Gamer**! Not every article is of interest to me, but when I come across a feature on a game I once loved, I'll invariably spend days poring over the pages. I must confess, however, that I don't buy the magazine every month, as sometimes my girlfriend buys a copy for me.

Anyway, back to the purpose of my email. I'd love an insight into what goes on behind the scenes with a videogames magazine, mainly the writing of features and the reviews and previews. If you could offer any kind of advice on how you yourself started out in the industry – your early work, for instance, and how you forged a career for yourself writing about games – I'd very much appreciate it.

Keep up the good work. I hope **Retro Gamer** is around for a long time; it is magazines like yours that give the fans of videogames, and the culture surrounding it, some hope that the passion they have for the pixels dancing around their screens is shared by others.

Kindest regards,

Kev Archer



» A lot of hard work goes into every issue. We're always glad when it's appreciated.

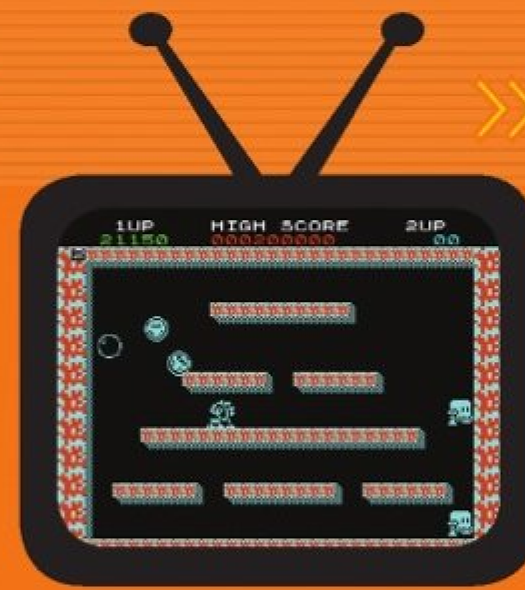
A lot of hard work goes into Retro Gamer, and it's all thanks to good old-fashioned journalism. Unlike many other games magazines, which are given updates and info by PRs for various publishers, the vast majority of Retro Gamer's unique content comes from tracking individuals down. Many times the trail will turn into a dead end – Darran's been unsuccessfully tracking



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>> YOUTUBE UPDATE

DARRAN'S RESOLVED TO put more awesome videos up and will be returning to 'Clash Of The Titans', an old article in **games™** that used to pit 8-bit conversions of classic videogames against each other. As always, you can find his stuff at **www.youtube.com/user/RetroGamerDaz**

the Stamper brothers down for about three years now – but occasionally you'll turn a corner and find the person you're looking for. And if you're really lucky they'll have read an issue featuring one of their friends, and will be so impressed that they'll want to appear in your hundredth issue. The person in question? You've got just four more weeks until you find out.

PSP RETRO?

Dear Retro Gamer,

I was wondering when you were going to start covering PSP games in the magazine. As you'll no doubt be aware, a new PSP will be available from February (or now if you live in Japan), so surely this makes the machine fair game for coverage?

The PSP gets a bad reputation, but it really is a fantastic device for retro owners. While there are obviously new titles such as *Monster Hunter*, *Killzone* and *Resistance*, it has many excellent retro compilations, especially from Japan, and lots of games based on classic franchises such as *OutRun*, *Lemmings* and *Castlevania*. It even has a huge number of 16-bit RPGs, making it an excellent addition to any retro gamer's library. I would love to see games like *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite*, *Jeanne D'Arc* and *Metal Gear Acid 2* receiving the Future Classic treatment in later issues. Please make this happen.

Charlie Smith, London

You're right, Charlie. The PSP is an excellent handheld, with a huge array of fantastic games available for it. As you've pointed out, there's a superb selection of titles that any retro fan would want in their collection, and a huge number of excellent Japanese releases, ranging from compilations to amazing racers like *Initial D*. Darran is a big fan of *Metal Gear Acid 2* and *Monster Hunter Freedom Unite*, so don't be surprised if they both crop up later.

KAISERS AND MAFIA

Dear Retro Gamer,

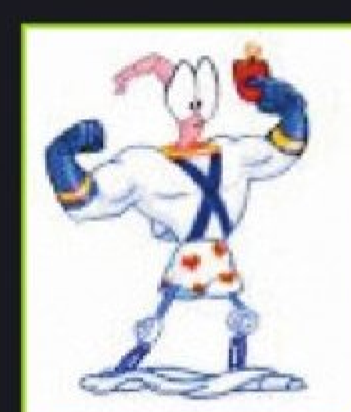
I really enjoyed your feature on the top 25 C64 games. My love for videogames developed on that system. Since I live in Germany, I grew up with both English and German games. I want to use this opportunity to tell you about my two favourite German C64 games, since I feel that you and maybe some other readers will find them quite enjoyable. If you think something like, 'How the heck am I supposed to play a German game?', keep in mind that I started playing when I was barely able to read, years away from learning English. Surely you can enjoy a foreign game if I was able to as a kid…

The first game is *Kaiser*. It is a turn-based economic simulation game set in the 18th Century. You are the ruler over some land, and the goal is to achieve the title 'emperor' ('Kaiser'). One turn in the game is a year, and before each year starts you distribute the grain resources and buy from other countries if the harvest was bad, get information about your population (births, deaths, people who moved from and to your land), as well as information about costs and proceeds of your land. You then have the chance to adjust taxes and your justice system. At the end of the year, you can build buildings or wage a war.

The next game is *Mafia*, and the setting can be compared to *Grand Theft Auto*,

> "To teenagers and those in their twenties, the games they played as kids in the Nineties will certainly be regarded as 'retro' to them"

RETROBATE PROFILE



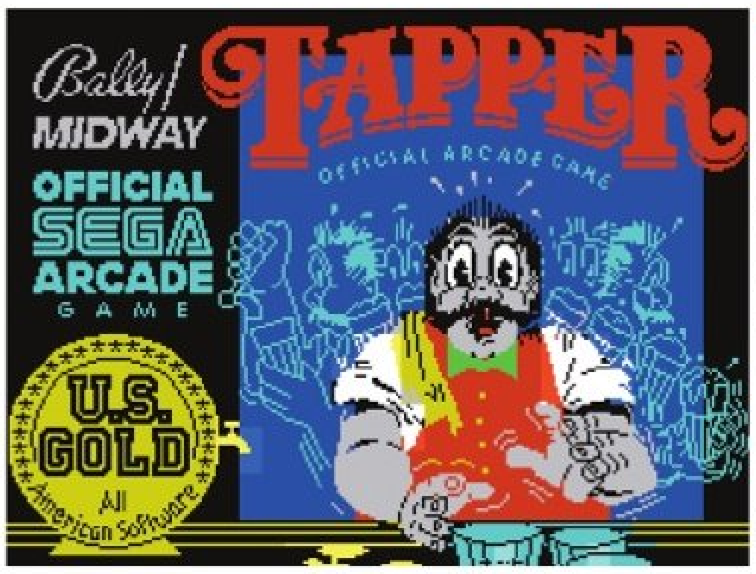
Name:	James Evans
Joined:	5 August 2011
Location:	Manchester
Occupation:	Retail
Website:	www.facebook.com/#!/profile.phpid=512839276
Fave Games System:	Super Nintendo



>> [PSP] Is it too early to start covering the PSP on a more regular basis? Charlie Smith certainly thinks we should.

* BEAT THE TEAM

Think you're good at retro games? See if you can beat the staff at some of their favourite titles



TAPPER

Thanks to the excellent Platinum Productions article, we've been rather nostalgic for the Spectrum conversion of *Tapper*. Don't forget to send in your high scores if you're able to beat us.



High Score: 16,475



DARRAN'S TAPPER TIPS

The most important thing to remember is that you can exit the top of the screen and appear at the bottom and vice versa. This is extremely useful, as things get very hectic. Also remember to grab money for bonus points when left on the bar by patrons.



High Score: 25,275



STUART'S TAPPER TIPS

Be proactive about collecting up the empties, as they can soon get on top of you. It's a useful way to influence the order of the incoming chaos. Also remember that pressing the fire button handily auto-places the barman beside the pump.

From the forum

» To have your say visit www.retrogamer.net/forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

Which do you love? Spectrum or Commodore 64?

Scapegoat I love both because neither is the Amstrad.

necronom The C64 is my favourite by a long way. It has great graphics and sound, plus excellent hardware. The number of games was vast, with a huge number of excellent games available across all genres.

ipmarks I'm a Spectrum man, mainly because that's the machine my father brought home at Christmas 1983, and it was the computer I played for the majority of the mid-Eighties – the very machine is still here, set up and working on the desk in front of me as I write this.

DreamcastRIP Speccy all day long. I never much liked the C64's Legoland graphics.

thevulture C64 to the core. SID chip, silky smooth scrolling, hardware sprites. If ever a home micro from the time was made for gaming, this was it. Took some flak for some of its lower-resolution graphics in games, but I'd only have to look at, say, C64 *Last Ninja 2* or *Platoon* vs the Spectrum version to know I'd made the right choice after software died a death on my beloved Atari 800XL.

Mayhem C64 all the way. I had played on a Spectrum via the kid two doors down before we got a C64, and it was a bit of a surprise to see just how much better it was technically. Sure, some of the graphics were a bit fat, but programmers soon learned how to work around that with high-res overlays and produce graphics that had the resolution of the Speccy, but with more colours. And then there are the games… and the music. And the proper, built-in joystick ports, none of this interface selection crap. And the disk drive offering up massive games.

fredghostmaster The Spectrum may have been technically inferior, but it simply had better games. History has proved this.

Morkin The Spectrum because all my school chums had one as well. Not a single C64 to be seen. At all. I didn't even see a C64 running, so I was very happy living in my Spectrum bubble, reading *Crash* and *YS*, playing everything. And the benefit of being a Spectrum owner was the never-ending supply of games circulating the classroom.

ncf1 It was just such a huge leap up from my Apple II's blips and beeps and phosphorous green monitor glow that burned permanent holes in my retina; all this new colour and amazing sound from the C64 quite simply left me overjoyed, and the games were superior also.

yethboth I love the Spectrum because of its ability of creating well-detailed sprites in games in general, as well as almost arcade-perfect sprites when it comes to arcade conversions. This makes up for the monochrome colours that the Spectrum has. Also the Spectrum 128K sound chip is more or less just as impressive as the Atari ST sound chip.

r0jaws I'm a Spectrum man by history, loved the games and gameplay. But I spend most of my time now exploring my C64 and its library. Sure, it's a better computer in many ways, but the Speccy was diverse, available and cheap, which meant nearly everyone had one. There was always more software.

Havantgottaclue The Commodore 64. It was a computer, the ZX Spectrum was a toy.

JackBurton-Me It's got to be the Spectrum. I first saw one at a friend's house aged five and played *Match Day* and *Booty*. From that day I've loved games. I'm now about to turn 32.

nakamura I could never really take the Speccy seriously. All of the games just looked rubbish compared to the best C64 games. I was about nine, though.

skinny I had a Spectrum. It was great because it meant being able to play computer games at home. I also only got it because my grandpa died and it was bought with my share of the inheritance money. Lovely man, and it gave me something to remember him by. And my parents probably thought I would use it to help with school.

Doddsy I loved my Speccy. There was something incredibly British about it. Both in its design and the quirky games made available for it like *Manic Miner*, *Skool Daze* and *Sabre Wulf*.

Deadpan666 Got to be Speccy for me! I sat and played my mate's C64 for weeks and got it into my head that that was the computer I wanted, but then I saw that the +2A came with a lightgun and *Operation Wolf*! That sold it to me. I soon discovered that despite both machines being pretty damn decent, the Speccy somehow had more character.

YOUR OPINION PLEASE

CHARACTER INACTIVITY

pratty Okay, so I was playing some *Donkey Kong Country Returns*, and while I was messing with my computer I turned back to my TV and saw *Donkey Kong* playing a DS. So what's your favourite character inactivity animation?

Sal Feena *Earthworm Jim* was great for funny animations.

nokgod Rincewind in *Discworld* had a habit of coming up to the screen and tapping it to see if you were still there. He said something too, but I can't remember what it was, for the life of me.

Merman The little computer person from *Little Computer People* would also knock on the screen if you didn't type/press anything for a while. I jumped out of my seat the first time he did it. Great sound effect.

TONY HAWK HD

OldSkoolCoolFool Apparently this is coming out next year as a downloadable game. From what I gather, it's not a remake, more of a 'best of' from *Tony Hawk 1* and *2*. I loved the early *Tony Hawk* games and can't wait for this. Anybody else a fan?

Joey Yes, very much looking forward to this. As Tony is in contract with Activision for another three years or so it was inevitable and the best thing to do IMO.

Rossi46 The trouble with the *Tony Hawk* series of games is that they're so unrealistic. After *Skate* came out, I never looked at another *Hawk* game. As an ex vert skater, the *Skate* games offered me far more reward and feeling of achievement.

Fightersmegamix Could be okay if they get it right. Doubt the original music will be included, though.

TABLETOPS

Phoenix I started out my retro game collection when I came across an old *Astro Wars* game on eBay, and it snowballed from there. Does anyone else share this love for early LED, VFD and LCD handhelds?

Shinobi I'd love to collect the whole set but they're too expensive. I keep being outbid on that *BMX Burner*, and *Galaxy Invader 10000* (the orange one) that I always wanted to play never turns up on fleaBay.

junkmale I must admit that I've picked up a few of these during my trawls through local charity shops, but I wouldn't call myself a collector. I will usually buy almost anything that 'clicks and whirs'. An article on them would be nice.

Antiriad2097 I have a small selection. I'd have a load more but they're so bulky. The only item I was very tempted by at Replay was a *Thundering Turbos*.

OLD vs NEW

Each month, we'll be finding out if the classics are better than their successors. This month, which *Grand Theft Auto* game is best?

Grand Theft Auto



Grand Theft Auto III Anniversary



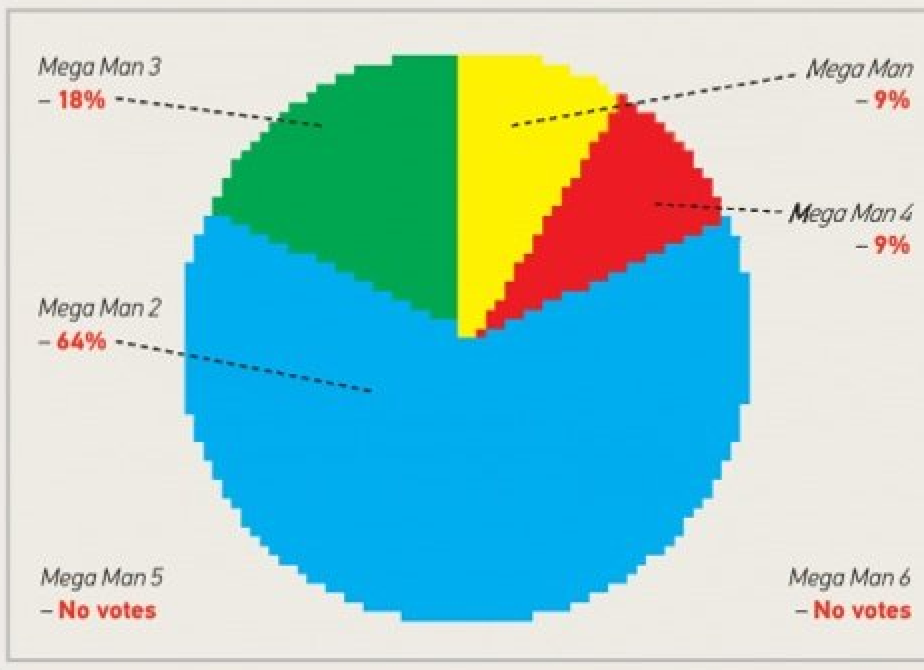
89% | 11%

AmigaJay Any version over a touchscreen *GTA*!

Scapegoat One vote for *GTA III* on my Android tablet due to the native Xbox controller support

HOT TOPIC

Best Mega Man NES game?



"*Mega Man 2* for me. It's the first *Mega Man* game I played and is still my favourite, mainly due to the great bosses and decent difficulty level"
–ShadowMan

"I like the ones before but there is something about *4* that clinches it for me. Could be the bosses, could be the Mega Buster. Either way it is my favourite"
– dste

although it is more a strategy than an action game. You start out as a little crook and want to become the head of the underworld of your city. At the beginning you take up jobs to earn money, so you can buy a gun and car. You can then build up your own gang, get people to work for you. You move around on a pretty nifty map made up solely of different coloured font characters. I was very impressed by that when playing it, since it is simple but very efficient. If you enter a bank you can try to rob it. Entering a pub gives you a chance to find people to work for you, deal with liquor and pick up rumours about coups going on.

You can play with up to four players. I remember playing with a friend for hours. It wasn't possible to save the game, so it was not quite possible to make breaks then. You snooze, you lose.

I hope you enjoyed reading about those two German gems of C64 games, and maybe you may even want to try them out. If you would like to play them and need help with instructions, controls and so on, I'd be glad to help you out. I would like to know what you think about them if you ever find time to play them.

Thanks for reading and greetings from Germany.

Kathrin



[C64] Kathrin's information was very interesting. So much so that we're now looking at covering both games in a future issue.

> "I miss when first-party releases could be something other than redundant sequels"

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Presents

Deadlines being what they are, this month we've all been discussing the lengthy Christmas break. Darran's was made up of the addition of several new board games to his ever-growing collection and Stuart got to enjoy his first Christmas with his daughter, while Kate didn't get the iMac she so desperately wanted, and instead had to make do with a Kindle and a visit to the zoo to feed the penguins.

See? Now this is what we love about Retro Gamer readers. They love to teach, as well as learn. We've never heard about either of the two games you've mentioned, but after reading your detailed reviews – so detailed that we sadly had to cut them down to fit on these pages – we've been itching to try them out. Don't be surprised if we get in touch with you for translation help, though. Our German is a little rusty.

UNDERRATED CLASSIC

Dear Retro Gamer,

A while back, I believe in issue 85, you had a chat with Tim Wright. Along with the games featured in his article, he's also known for creating the soundtrack to *Colony Wars*, which I honestly believe has some of the most underrated music in all of gaming.

Indeed, *Colony Wars* – the original, mainly – is of a style and genre that are both depressingly uncommon these days, especially outside of the indie scene. I miss the days when first-party releases could be something other than redundant sequels or soulless 'me too' attempts. *Colony Wars* had a great impact on my taste in sci-fi and deserves far more recognition than it generally gets. I don't believe you've ever done a feature on the first instalment or the series, and either would make me very happy, though I still say the original is easily the most deserving.

Thanks,

Ciaran McConville, Winchester

Good shout on *Colony Wars*, Ciaran. It's a really underrated game, and while it's not aged quite as gracefully as some titles of that era, it still retains a quality that makes it really enjoyable to play. We'll have to see if we can track down any of the original creators for you.

CURRENTLY PLAYING









DARRAN
Mass Effect 2
It's been out forever, but I've only just completed it. The verdict? Not as good as everyone's been making out. It's an enjoyable game, and the last level is fantastic, but the rest of it isn't up to the same high standard.



STUART
Sonic CD
This month I've been playing and replaying the excellent *Sonic CD*. I've been trying to find all those time machines in a bid to secure a good future for Sonic and his pals. It's a great game that's been a joy to revisit.



DAVID
Uncharted 3
I'm still enjoying Drake's latest, and playing it on the hardest setting is satisfying. Little beats the combination of set pieces, shooting and a gripping plot. If only Naughty Dog could knock a new game out every year.

retro GAMER

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Studio equipment courtesy of Lastolite (www.lastolite.co.uk)

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☎ (Overseas) +44 1795 592 872
13 issue subscription UK – £51.90
13 issue subscription Europe – £70
13 issue subscription ROW – £80

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Printed by Wyndeham Heron Ltd, Bentalls Complex, Colchester Road, Heybridge, Maldon, Essex, CM9 4NW
☎ 01621 877 777

Distributed in the UK & Eire by: Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London, EC1A 9PT
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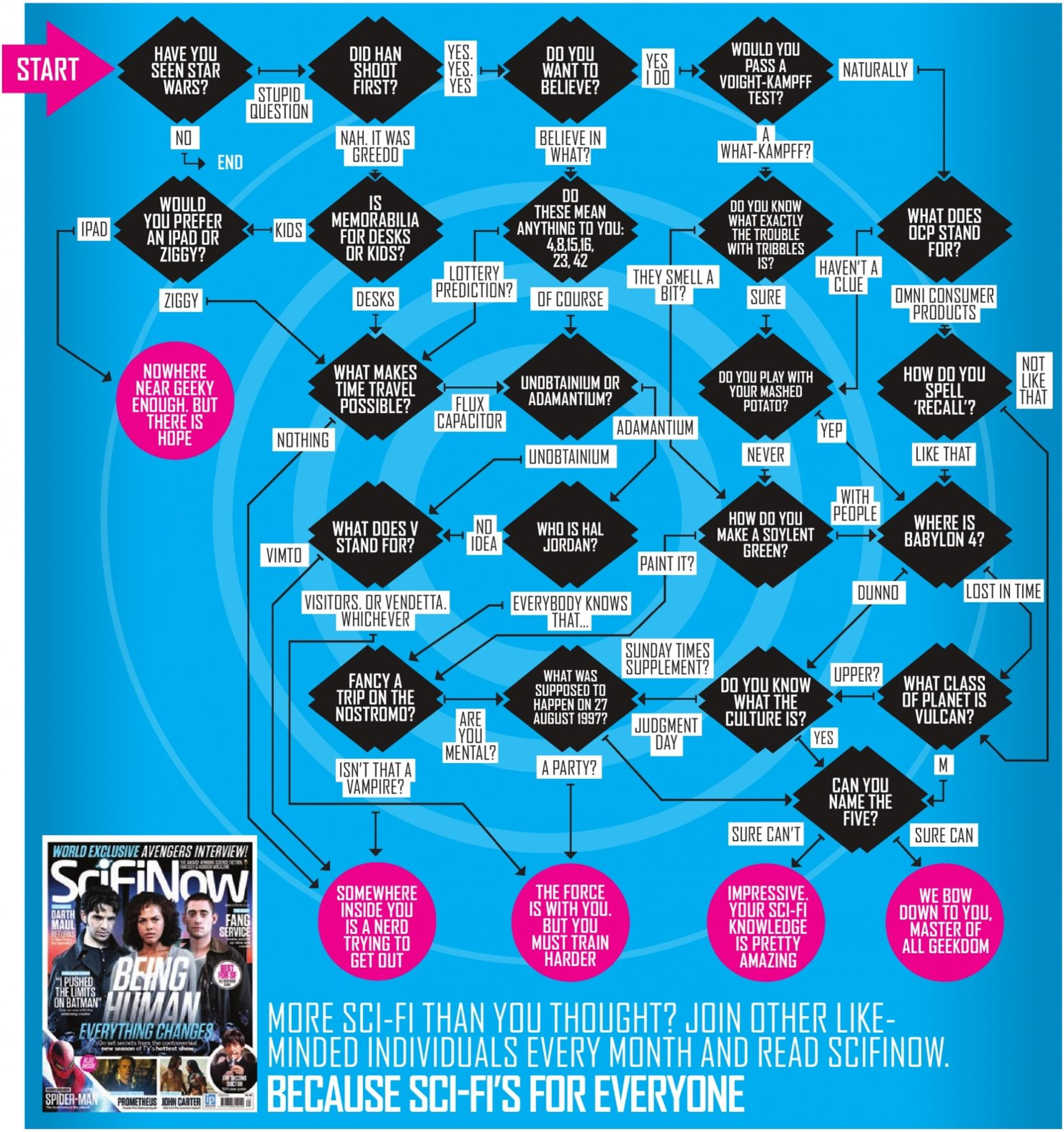
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 ISSN 1742-3155

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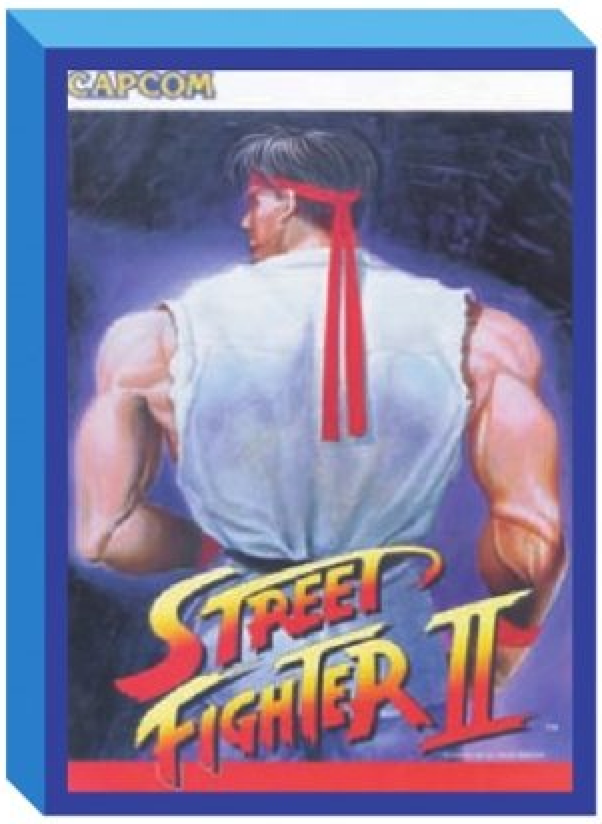
So this is it. The big one. The 100th issue, and boy do we have some great stuff planned for you. We'd love to tell you exactly what's in the issue, but where would the fun be in that? Let's just say we're planning our most spectacular issue yet


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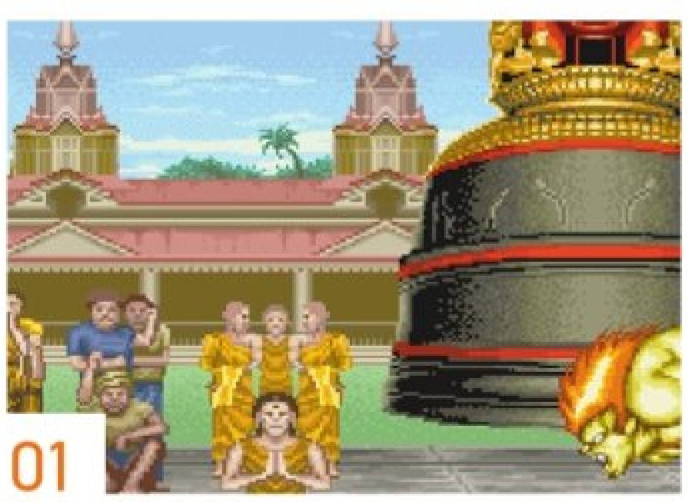

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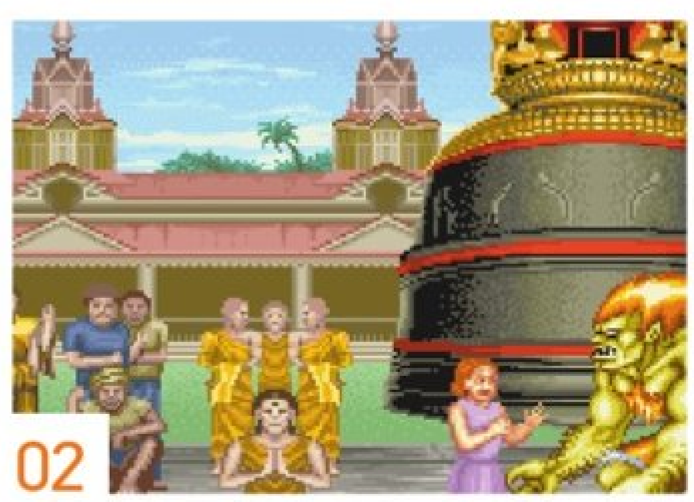


STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR - BLANKA

» *Street Fighter II* has its fair share of endings, but none were more poignant than Blanka's. For the entire tournament the player has been led to assume he is simply a hairy, angry, middle-aged Pikachu. However, in his ironic shock ending, it's revealed this daunting fighter does possess a heart, and may not be a complete monster after all.


01

» After wiping the floor with M. Bison, Blanka celebrates by doing several forward flips. Through his victory he starts to feel accepted. It's the happiest day of Blanka's so far miserable life. But it's about to get a whole lot better when…


02

» A frail woman approaches and tells him he is her long lost son, Jimmy. Blanka can't believe his hair-stuffed ears and is understandably apprehensive of the woman's claims. Understandably so, we think; the likeness is hardly uncanny.


03

» The woman explains her story in more detail. She lost her son when he was very young. Jimmy was travelling on a budget airline to Mexico when a helium balloon got sucked into the engine and the plane went down in a jungle.


04

» She then spots one of the gold anklets around Blanka's legs and explains they were a gift from her to her son. Amazingly, the anklet has stretched at the same accelerated rate as her boy. Not twigging this fact, Blanka begins to believe the story.


05

» Blanka decides that the woman is his long lost mum. Sadly, a downed-but-not-out Bison gets back on his feet, escapes on a chopper and then calls in an air strike. The Shadaloo forces devastate the city. But at least they were reunited and happy.